

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

AUGUST 1979

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NO DAY FOR MURDER

The New **MIKE SHAYNE** Short Novel
by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

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Novelets:

**THE
TATTERED
CORPSE**

by
W.L. FIELDHOUSE

**SOMEONE WITH
A KNIFE**

by
**PATRICK
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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

AUGUST 1979
VOL. 43 NO. 5

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

NO DAY FOR MURDER

by BRETT HALLIDAY

The Miami Redhead had two assignments he could have done without: nailing a gunrunning gang and finding a long-vanished woman. They turned out to be equally dangerous 5 to 45

TWO NOVELETS:

THE TATTERED CORPSE	
W. L. Fieldhouse	56
SOMEONE WITH A KNIFE	
Patrick Scaffetti	100

SEVEN NEW SHORT STORIES:

THE GOLDEN LADY	
Edward D. Hoch	46
STRAIGHT FALLS	
R. G. Hallawell	52
THE ELEVENTH DAY	
Grover Brinkman	76
A PROBLEM IN COMMUNICATION	
Gary Arpin	82
MEET ME AT THE CASH BAR	
Wade H. Mosby	93
CARMEN	
Kathleen Hershey	118
FRIEND OF THE FAMILY	
Jack Ritchie	122

TWO DEPARTMENTS:

MIKE SHAYNE'S MYSTERY MAKERS	4
STIFF COMPETITION	
John Ball	126

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Mike Shayne

Mystery Makers

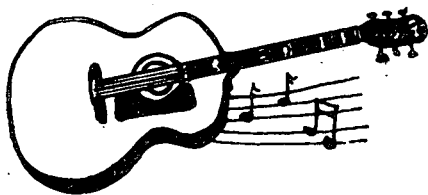
EDWARD D. HOCH, who was born in Rochester, New York, and still lives there, has been a full-time writer since 1968. He has published only four novels (two of them, *The Transvection Machine* and *The Fellowship of the Hand*, are blends of mystery and science fiction), but his short stories number over 400. "The Oblong Room" won the Mystery Writers of America's Edgar as best short story of 1967.

W.L. FIELDHOUSE spent two and a half years as a member of S-2, United States Army intelligence, stationed in Germany, an experience which provided him with authentic background for his novelets about Major Clifford Lansing of the CID. Still in his twenties and single, he is currently employed as a civilian security guard, but his goal is a career as a professional writer. From here, it looks like a safe bet.

JACK RITCHIE, born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1922, became a full-time writer at the age of thirty-one. On New Year's Eve, 1953, his literary agent Larry Sternig helped him celebrate his first sale by introducing him to Rita Krohne — and Jack married Rita in 1954. He too has published over 400 stories, and has written all types, but in recent years he has concentrated almost entirely on detective and crime stories. No less than fourteen of these have been reprinted in *Best Detective Stories of the Year*.

In the 1940s, LAWRENCE TREAT published novels including *B as in Banshee*, *D as in Dead*, *H as in Hangman*, *O as in Omen*, *T as in Trapped*, *V as in Victim*, and others in the same alliterative vein. He abandoned alphabetic acrobatics with *Trial and Terror* in 1949, and since then has produced titles like *Weep for a Wanton* and *Lady, Drop Dead*. However, named, his books and short stories are eagerly awaited by mystery buffs.

No Day For Murder



by BRETT HALLIDAY

Shayne Had a Double-Barreled Problem: Nailing the Gun-runners, and Locating a Missing Mother. The Second Part Should Have Been Easy, but There Are Things More Dangerous than Guns . . .

THE DIRT ROAD off the highway had not been used much in a long time. It snaked in toward Biscayne Bay, flanked by swampland. Old trees poked up out of the stagnant water, their gnarled branches dripping with moss. A hawk perched on a branch watched Mike Shayne's Buick roll by, then swooped off, gliding over the still water, looking for prey.

Shayne drove with the car windows down. He could feel the breeze coming in off the Bay,

smell the tidal odors. He knew he did not have much farther to go.

An eerie stillness hung over the old road. Shayne eased up on the gas pedal, letting the car roll slowly now past abandoned oil tanks rusting under the late March sun. The big redhead eyed the faded black lettering on one of the old tanks — *Carey Oil Co.* The Carey Oil Company had gone out of business five years before. Fire had gutted the small office and pumping shed and blackened

several of the now-empty tanks. Arson? It had never been proven.

It was an odd place to meet a man — a man Shayne didn't know, had never met. An itinerant fisherman named Jory Rojak.

He eased the Buick around a pothole, frowned as he spotted tire tracks ahead. Someone else had driven here before him? Jory?

An undefineable warning rippled down the big redhead's spine. He reached inside his glove compartment, took out his snub-nosed Police Magnum .38, slipped it into his coat pocket.

Up ahead, someone screamed. A high, wild, shrill of pain. Cut short . . . abruptly. A moment later something heavy splashed in the Bay.

Shayne rolled the Buick past the last of the old oil tanks and braked to a stop by a flight of wooden steps leading down to a jetty thrust out into Biscayne Bay. The water that lapped against the old pilings had an oily slick. An old wooden boat with a small cabin rocked gently by the end of the jetty, a frayed mooring rope looped around a piling post. The name on the prow of the boat read *Maggie*.

There was a man on the jetty. He was squatting beside a bait bucket and a fishpole, cleaning something that looked like a knife. He turned as Shayne stepped out of the car, closed the door behind him and started down the steps.

The man was wearing an old

canvas windbreaker over a blue shirt and faded blue denims, but his eyes were hidden behind a pair of expensive sunglasses and his tawny hair showed no gray.

He picked up a fair-sized fish from inside a gunny sack, gutted it, tossed it down into the water as seagulls swooped in, screeching and fighting for their share.

Shayne paused a few feet away. The man turned to look at him now. He had strong brown hands, but they showed no rope burns, and the big redhead doubted if they had ever held a line or hauled in an anchor. There was a small crescent scar on his chin.

"Hi," the man said. His voice was controlled, casual, pleasant. "Damn gulls," he added. "Scare the fish away."

Shayne said, "You Jory Rojak?"

The man hesitated, then nodded.

The redhead edged closer, glanced down into the water below the jetty. A small bloodstain mingled with the oil slick. It could have come from the gutted fish.

The man said: "I don't know you, do I?"

"No," Shayne replied. His hand remained inside his coat pocket, gripping his revolver. There had been a scream and a splash riding the breeze in off the Bay as he had driven here. And the man facing him was too young

to be old Jory, too neatly dressed. Also, itinerant fishermen weren't likely to be wearing seventy-five-dollar shoes.

The man's hand closed tight around the handle of his fish knife. The blade was long and sharp and had a wicked curve to it.

"Who are you?" the man growled.

"Mike Shayne," the big red-head answered. The man's eyes were hidden behind the dark glasses, but there was sweat on his face. Shayne's smile was cold. "I was supposed to meet old Jory here, just about this time . . ."

The man licked his lips. "Yeah. I'm Jory. I—"

Shayne cut him off. "*The hell you are!*" The big redheaded investigator glanced down at the blood-stained water below. "Who's in the water? Jory?"

The man behind the dark glasses crouched by the bait bucket. He glanced past Shayne, at someone on shore, made a quick motion with his left hand.

Shayne's lightning reflexes saved his life. He dropped to the pier boards just as the shot cracked sharply against the bright morning stillness, then rolled violently away as the phony fisherman threw his knife. The steel blade thunked into the worn planking inches from the red-head's face.

Shayne kept rolling, gripping his gun. The second shot from the

man on shore came close, too close! There was only one way to go if he wanted to stay alive. He twisted, heaved himself over the side and dropped five feet into the bloodstained water.

He was still gripping his gun as he surfaced, swam quickly under the old pier. He held onto a crosspiece with one hand, holding his gun ready in the other. A crab scuttled across the support and dropped into the water, heading down into the muddy depths. Shayne grimaced, waited.

He heard footsteps pound up the wooden steps leading to the small parking area behind the fire-gutted office. A few moments later a car engine roared into life. It headed away from the bay, fading toward the highway.

Shayne came out from under the pier, found a crossbeam, pulled himself up on it and slowly climbed up to the pier. The gulls came back, circling and squawling over the red stain that slowly began to dissipate.

Shayne sloshed to the end of the jetty, stepped down into the old boat, looked inside the cabin. There was no one inside. But there was a pipe resting inside a sea-shell ashtray. Shayne picked it up. The bowl was still warm.

Dripping, the redhead came back along the pier, looked down into the murky waters. Sooner or later the body would surface. He scowled. It was possible that

someone had seen him drive down this way. An investigation could prove troublesome. He'd have to head it off.

He walked back to his car, took off his coat, draped it across the back seat. He was soaking wet and the breeze off the Bay chilled him. He got behind the wheel, slipped his unfired gun back into the glove compartment, made a tight turn around the old fire-blackened pumping station and headed back for the highway.

A few miles farther away the redhead pulled into a gas station and put in a call to Miami Chief of Police Will Gentry. The area here was outside Gentry's authority, but Will was the logical man to call. The local police would have to be alerted and told that divers would find a body down in ten or twelve feet of water just off the old Carey Oil pier, the body of Jory Rojak.

Shayne identified himself to Gentry, and hung up after relaying the information. He knew he'd be hearing from the Chief later, but he was wet and uncomfortable, and this was neither the time nor the place to go into a lengthy explanation.

It was close to noon when Shayne drove down into his underground parking slot and took the elevator up to his apartment. He was in a sour frame of mind. As a rule, he didn't like undercover work, had a special distaste

in working for a government agency. But Dan Wickham was a friend, and Mike Shayne had always cooperated with the Miami D.A.'s office.

The redhead stripped to the buff, showered, changed into a new lightweight suit. He wrapped his oil-stained soggy clothes in a plastic bag, dropped them into his laundry basket, left a note for his cleaning woman.

Pouring himself a stiff shot of Martell, he settled into his easy chair and put in a call to Daniel Wickham, Assistant D.A., to be told by his secretary that Wickham was in a closed meeting and would not be available until later in the afternoon.

Shayne settled back and lighted a cigarette. He had taken this case reluctantly, knowing the work could be dangerous, the pay minimal.

"I won't be able to help you," Danny had told him. "You'll be strictly on your own, Mike. Illegal gunrunning. The Syndicate's behind it. Automatic weapons, grenades, even missiles. They're being funneled through Miami to ships waiting offshore. The black market in guns is big business. We know the weapons are coming through here. We don't know how they get out to the ship."

"Who's behind it?" Mike had asked.

"Joey Cassell," Wickham replied. "He's the local Syndicate

boss. He's got a big place out on the Gold Coast, but he's in and out of Miami a lot."

The Assistant D.A. shrugged. "So far we've got nothing on him. Nothing we can make stick. But he's our man, Mike. If we could nail the gunrunners, tie Joey as the man behind it..."

The phone rang, interrupting the redhead's reflections. He picked it up, said, "Mike Shayne here."

Chief Gentry's voice sounded displeased. "Divers brought up a body from the old Carey Oil pier. Local authorities have identified it as a fisherman named Jory Rojak. Now I want to know what you were doing down there, Mike?"

"Sorry," Shayne answered. "Client confidential, Will."

He could almost see his old friend's face redden, his neck cords swell. "Client confidential, hell!" the Miami Chief of Police roared. "I'm being asked how I knew there was a body down there, and I need some answers!"

"An anonymous telephone call," the redhead replied. "You've had them before." Then, forestalling Gentry's angry reply: "Will, I can't tell you now. But I'll keep you informed as soon as I have something more definite to go on."

Gentry's sigh billowed over the wire. "All right, Mike. You've always played square with me before. But I have to know what's

going on. Murder anywhere in my area is always my business."

And sometimes mine, Shayne thought as he hung up on Gentry.

He settled back in his chair, sipped his brandy. Joey Cassell . . . retired businessman, late fifties . . . moved to the Miami area almost twenty years before, from New York . . . settled in the Gold Coast, ran a laundry and dry-cleaning business in town. It seemed legitimate. So were his other businesses, interlocking companies, holdings. It would have taken a team of certified accountants to untangle them, *if* the law had had reason to look into his books.

The Miami police had a file on Joey, picked up from New York. A small-time hood who had worked his way up in the Syndicate ranks. Twice arrested for assault with a deadly weapon. No conviction. Questioned in connection with the murder of a teamster union boss. No charges.

Here in the Miami area, Joey had kept his nose clean. He played golf, gave generously to charities, was even invited to social functions. A slim, still-handsome, graying man.

The gunrunning had begun recently. The Coast Guard had known of freighters lying offshore, just beyond national jurisdiction. Freighters flying foreign flags, under Liberian registry.

They knew high-speed boats were running out to them at night

— boats that could outrun any Coast Guard cutter.

Danny Wickham was sure Joey Cassell was behind it. Shayne wasn't quite sure why. There seemed to be a deep antagonism between Danny and Joey, something that must have happened earlier between them, before Shayne had known either of them.

The big redhead plucked at his left earlobe. He knew that was why Danny had hired him — to find something he could pin on Joey Cassell.

It was Danny who had arranged the meeting at the Carey Oil pier. Jory had called the Assistant D.A., said he had information on the gunrunning. He wanted a meeting with Danny or someone out of his office . . . and twenty-five-thousand dollars!

"Find out what he has first." Danny had said. "No money up front. No way."

Whatever old Jory, itinerant fisherman, had found out about the gunrunning had died with him. The killers had beaten Shayne to the meeting by mere minutes.

How had they found out? Was there a leak in the Assistant D.A.'s office?

This unpleasant thought rode with the private investigator as he finished his brandy, took the elevator down to the garage and drove across town to Flagler Street, where he had his office.

II

LUCY HAMILTON was going through the morning mail when Shayne walked in. Lucy had a new hairdo, but he was too preoccupied to notice. She was wearing a new spring outfit, too, but he barely glanced at her as he walked by to his office.

"Good morning, Michael," Lucy sang out sweetly. She seemed to be in excellent spirits.

"Good morning," Shayne growled.

Lucy glanced at her desk clock. "Keeping banking hours now, Michael?"

He paused, looked at her now. A smile broke the taut corners of his lips. "Hey, Angel, that's a nice outfit you're wearing!" Then, frowning, "What did you do to your hair?"

"So you noticed," Lucy said. "Like it?"

"No," he growled.

Lucy had not expected he would. She didn't like it much herself, but she had felt she needed a change.

"Where have you been all morning?"

The redhead stalled. He had not told Lucy where he was going. He had not wanted to worry her.

"Took up jogging," he said. "Man has to keep in shape these days."

Lucy ran her admiring gaze over Shayne's powerful frame. A mat of red hair capped a ruggedly handsome face. Shoulders like those of a Miami Dolphin

linebacker. Hands strong enough to bend a half-inch bar . . .

She sighed, nodded. "Jogging? Of course! Everyone's doing it. I may take it up myself, Michael."

Shayne looked her over. Lucy was still a very beautiful woman.

"What for?" he growled.

It was not intended for an answer. He turned to his office, said over his shoulder: "Hold all calls except from Danny Wickham's office." He glanced at his wristwatch. "And no more clients. I've got all I can handle."

He closed the door behind him, opened a window. It was a pleasantly warm day without a hint of rain on the horizon. A few puffy white clouds floated in a deep blue sky. There was just enough ocean breeze to keep the smog from building up in the city.

The redhead went to his desk, sat down, took a bottle of Martell from inside a desk drawer, poured three fingers into a paper cup.

He had to get to Danny today — tell him there was a leak in his office. Someone had fingered Jory Rojak — and whoever killed Jory Rojak now knew Mike Shayne was working on the case.

The redhead propped his feet on his desktop, leaned back in his swivel chair. Tom Hanson, the incumbent D.A., was retiring at the end of his term. A big, florid-faced man aging visibly in office, he was reported as saying

he wanted to spend more time with his family, play a little golf, etc. A machine politician, he had been little more than a figurehead during his last years in office.

This gave Danny Wickham a chance of moving up into the main office. Danny was young, ambitious, already making a name for himself as a crime fighter. Nailing Joey Cassell to the gunrunning out of the Miami area would cinch the D.A.'s office for him.

Someone came into the outer office. Mike heard the murmur of voices, disregarded it. Lucy knew he didn't want to be disturbed.

He had promised to keep his being an investigator for the Assistant D.A.'s office under cover, but the redhead knew he would have to clue Chief Gentry in on it sooner or later. It was Gentry who had, in a way, gotten Shayne into this. Gentry liked young Wickham and had said more than once he would be happy to see Wickham in the D.A.'s office.

The intercom buzzer interrupted Shayne's thoughts. He leaned forward, flipped a switch, said, "What is it, Lucy?"

Lucy's voice came through the small speaker. "Someone to see you, Michael."

Shayne frowned. "For Christ's sake, Lucy! I told you I didn't want to see anyone today!"

"It's urgent," Lucy said. Then her voice lowered and he heard

her say to someone. "Just a minute. I'll talk to him."

The redhead waited until Lucy opened his door and poked her head inside before saying flatly, "I said no, Lucy! I don't care if it's the mayor himself. Get him out of here!"

Lucy pursed her lips. "It isn't the mayor." Shayne recognized the look on her face. "And it's not only a him . . . it's a her, too. I think you should see them, *Michael!*"

Shayne looked up at the ceiling, sighed. When Lucy put that special emphasis on his name, it meant she thought it was very important and would not take no for an answer.

"Oh, all right," he growled, sliding his feet off the desktop. "Send them in."

The airedale came bounding in first, nosing suspiciously around Shayne's legs.

"*Hey!*" the redhead said. "This isn't a fire hydrant."

The airedale barked sharply, which meant he either understood or disapproved, but he trotted off as a girl's voice said, "Go sit down, Gotcha!"

Shayne eyed the two young people who came in behind the dog, frowning slightly at their appearance. Road people — orange-red backpacks, frayed Levi's, sandals, loose-fitting T-shirts. *Save the whales*. was stenciled on both T-shirts.

The boy looked about nineteen,

towheaded, bronzed, an inch or two over six feet. Slender frame, dreamy blue eyes. His hair was long, caught up in a ponytail down his back. He was carrying a guitar.

The girl looked about eighteen, blonde, grayish-green eyes, tanned, well filled out in the right places. She wore her hair long also, down her back, and there was innocence in her face, in her gaze as she looked around the office.

"Hi," the boy said, extending a hand across Shane's desk. "I'm Jonathan. This is Cindy. And he's" — pointing to the airedale — "Gotcha."

He smiled then as though he had explained it all. He found a chair, sat down, began to pick softly through his guitar strings.

Shayne waited for a moment, holding his irritation in check. Cindy came to the desk, smiled shyly. "Don't mind Jonathan," she said. "I'm Cindy Day. He's my brother."

Day? Shayne frowned. The name rang some distant familiar bell 'way back in his memory.

"We need your help," Cindy went on. She glanced at Jonathan, who was intent on tuning his guitar.

"I guess I mean *I* do." The girl corrected herself. "Jonathan just came along to keep an eye on me."

"I see." The redhead nodded. He didn't, of course. He shot an

accusing glance at Lucy standing in the doorway. She smiled sweetly back at him.

"What can I do for you?" he asked Cindy.

"I want you to help me find my mother," the girl replied.

He began to shake his head.

Cindy said, "You *are* a private investigator, aren't you?"

"The best," Lucy put in, smiling.

Shayne picked up his paper cup, took a sip of brandy. Then, with the girl's eyes on him, he felt guilty. He turned to Lucy, said: "See if there are any Cokes left in the cooler outside. Bring in two.

"Sit down," he told Cindy after Lucy left. He waited until she obeyed, then, "Look, Cindy, I'm very busy. And finding lost mothers isn't really in my line. Let me call the police. I know a sergeant in the Missing Persons department..."

He reached for the phone, paused. The girl's eyes were watching. They were trusting, expectant.

"The police? I don't think you understand," Cindy said. "I just want to *find* my mother."

Shayne's hand pulled away from the phone. He knew why Lucy had foisted these two kids on him now. Lucy Hamilton was a sucker for strays, be they kittens, puppies, or young people in trouble.

"Well then, tell me about it," the redhead said. "How long has

your mother been missing?"

"Ever since I was born," the girl said. "I was adopted by Jonathan's parents when I was only a few months old. Jonathan and I are not really brother and sister, but we were raised that way."

She smiled at Shayne. "That's why we came here from Sandusky. That's in Ohio. Mr. Day said if anything should ever happen to him and Marcy, his wife, that we should look you up. He said you'd remember. Something about Korea..."

Shayne leaned back in his chair. "Yes," he said. "Sergeant Day — Sergeant Percy Day!"

Cindy made a face. "Dad hated that name. Never used it. Not while I was growing up, anyway. Everyone in town knew him as Bob Day."

"What happened?"

"They were killed in a car accident, about a month ago." Cindy turned as Lucy came back with two Coke bottles. She said, "Thank you, ma'am," as she took her bottle. Jonathan reached up absently for his, murmured, "Super!" and bent back over his guitar.

Lucy turned to the big redhead. "Anything else, Michael?"

"Not yet," Mike told her. He knew she was curious, but it was her fault he was even listening to the Day kids. Then, as Lucy left reluctantly, Shayne relented, flipped his intercom switch to

on. Lucy could listen in if she wanted to.

"I guess we're orphans now," Cindy continued. "Our parents didn't have any close relatives. So I thought I'd come here to find my real mother."

"How do you know she's in Miami?"

"We checked the local records in Sandusky," Cindy explained. "I was of age. By law they had to open them up to me. My mother's name was Gloria Bostick. She wasn't married when she had me."

"And you feel she's living here now?"

"That's what they told us," Cindy said. "My mother was going to live with an Aunt Milly Bates. That was almost nineteen years ago."

"We looked in the phone book," Jonathan said, surprising Shayne, who thought the boy hadn't been listening. "There were only a few Bosticks listed, and none of them were Cindy's mother. And we couldn't find a Milly Bates."

Shayne ran his fingers through the air. *Cindy's mother could have moved away, or got married, he thought. Or just changed her name. Nineteen years ago it was still socially unacceptable to have a baby out of wedlock.*

"That's why we came to see you," Jonathan said. "Dad used to talk a lot about you. You saved his life during the war, he said.

Dad sold used cars for a living. I guess he was a good salesman."

"You will help, won't you?" Cindy asked.

Lucy was standing in the doorway again, watching Shayne. The redhead sighed, nodded. "I'll look around," he promised. "See what I can dig up. But I can't promise anything."

Cindy came around the desk, gave him a hug, a peck on the cheek. "Gee, thanks, Mr. Shayne."

Jonathan stood up. "We'll keep in touch," he said.

"Where are you staying?"

"Oh, anywhere," Cindy answered, smiling brightly.

"On the beach," Jonathan said. "I like the beach."

"You mean . . . one of those beach hotels?" Lucy sounded dubious. "They're terribly expensive . . . especially this time of year."

"Heavy, man . . . heavy," Jonathan murmured, plucking at his guitar strings.

Cindy seemed surprised. "Oh, no, ma'am. Jonathan means right on the beach. We've got our sleeping bags."

Lucy stared at the young girl for a moment, wondering if they were putting her on. Then she turned to the redhead.

"Michael!"

The way she said it meant, *Do something!*

Shayne finished his brandy, crumpled the paper cup, dropped

it into his wastebasket.

"They've got a law in Miami," he explained. "No sleeping on the beach. It's called loitering, or vagrancy . . . something like that." He turned to Lucy. "Get them a room at the Sinbad . . . separate rooms," he added quickly. "It's not too far from the beach, and they don't charge an arm and a leg. Tell Margie to put it on my account."

"Cindy could stay with me," Lucy volunteered. "I have a spare room."

"Thank you, ma'am," Cindy said. "But Jonathan and me . . . we don't like being separated."

Lucy nodded. "I understand. Two rooms at the Sinbad," she repeated on her way out.

Shayne took a couple of bills from his wallet, handed them to Jonathan. "Get yourselves something to eat." He fixed his gaze on the youngster. "And if I find you've used any of this money for pot or angel dust, I'll break both your legs!"

Jonathan smiled faintly. "Never touch the stuff, Mr. Shayne." He held up his guitar. "Got my sound . . . that's enough." He turned to Cindy. "I spotted a good hamburger stand on the way in."

"And a double order of fries," the girl said.

"My secretary will tell you how to get to the motel," Shayne said as they moved to leave. "Do you have a car?"

Jonathan shook his head. "Hitched in."

"We don't have much money," Cindy said. "Estate's tied up in probate, whatever that means. Jonathan and I . . . we didn't want to wait around."

"We'll pay you when we can," Jonathan said. "I think Dad left some money."

Shayne shrugged. "Yeah, do that."

Cindy looked back from the doorway. "Gee, I hope my mother will be glad to see me."

Maybe, the redhead thought sourly as they left. Most likely not.

He scowled, drummed his fingers on the desktop. Somewhere in this sprawling, sub-tropical city of Miami was Cindy's natural mother. Gloria Bostick must have been very young when she had Cindy. A young, confused girl. Would she want to see her daughter now?

Shayne walked to the door, looked in on Lucy. The Day kids were gone. Lucy was standing by the window, looking out. She seemed to be daydreaming.

Shayne watched her for a long moment. Lucy had never married. Was she sorry?

He started to say something, but the phone beat him to it.

Lucy turned, saw him, said, "I'll get it, Michael."

It was Danny Wickham's office, and Danny would be expecting Shayne at three.

III

SHAYNE FOUND a slot marked *Visitors* in the parking lot behind the county building and took the elevator up to the second floor. Danny Wickham's office was just down the hall.

As he approached the office a woman came out, heading for the elevators. She was a good-looking woman with brownish hair, a nice figure, probably in her late thirties. Shayne knew her, but not too well.

She looked upset as she hurried past him, her head lowered, clutching a white handkerchief in her right fist.

Shayne said, "Hello, Mrs. Wickham."

Helen Wickham jerked her head up, paused. "Oh, hello, Mr. Shayne."

She hurried on, and the redhead watched as she paused by the elevators, then decided to take the stairway down.

The girl in Danny's outer office said, "Go right in, Mr. Shayne. Mr. Wickham's expecting you."

Danny was on the phone, talking to someone who was his superior, judging by his tone. He saw Shayne, cupped his hand over the receiver, said, "Come on in, Mike. Shut the door."

He leaned back in his chair, said into the phone: "Yes, sir — I'll do that. I understand, sir."

He turned to Shayne, waved him to a chair. Danny Wickham

was a trim athletic forty-year-old with black curly hair, sharp gray eyes. He exuded energy, ambition. He was in his shirtsleeves, open-collared, comfortable. He didn't drink, didn't smoke and found time for an hour's workout at a nearby gym once a day.

"I'm waiting for a clearer interpretation of the pornography law," he said to the man on the other end of the line. "The way it stands, we can't prosecute. Not and win." He pursed his lips, looked at Mike, shrugged as he listened. "I'll do that, sir."

He hung up, swiveled around to face the redhead. "You meet up with Jory?"

Shayne shook his head.

Danny's gaze darkened. "What happened?"

Shayne told him.

"A leak here — in my office?" Danny shook his head. "Can't be. No one knew about Jory — except you, Mike."

"Someone else did," the redhead growled. "The man who killed Jory was there only a few minutes ahead of me."

"You get a good look at him?"

"Enough to know him again," Shayne said.

"One of Joey Cassell's men," Danny said grimly. "Had to be. *Damn!*" He pounded his fist on the desk in frustration. "You've got to get him, Mike — find out how he's getting those guns through!"

"It won't be easy," Shayne

said. He shook a cigarette out of a crumpled pack, fired up. Danny edged away from the smoke, but didn't say anything. "They know I'm working for you."

Danny's gray eyes met Shayne's. "You want out?"

Shayne stood up, walked to Danny's desk, butted out his cigarette in a small trophy cup Wickham had won playing handball. He did it quietly, holding his temper, but Danny read the look in the redhead's face and backed off.

"Hell, Mike — I was just asking."

"A man was killed this morning. If I had been there ten minutes earlier, he might still be alive." Shayne's voice was level, cold. "You couldn't get me off this case now if you wanted to, Danny!"

The Assistant D.A. leaned back in his chair, made a peaceful gesture with his hands. "I'm getting pressure from all sides, Mike." His tone was conciliatory, asking to be understood. "Lay off Joey Cassell. Even my wife..."

Shayne nodded. "I met her outside."

"This is between us," Danny said, lowering his voice. "And it dies here, Mike."

The big redhead waited. "Some one called her this morning, threatened her. Get me to lay off Joey... or else!"

The young Assistant D.A. stood

up, began to pace. "Maybe I'm getting in over my head, Mike. But I want Joey."

"Even if it means your wife getting hurt?"

Danny turned, facing Shayne. "I'm going to get her out of here. We have friends in California."

He came back to his desk, looked suddenly tired. "I know how I sound, Mike. Young, ambitious, willing to do anything to get elected D.A. this year. But not my wife, Mike... and not you."

He sat down, looked across his desk at the redhead. "I don't want you winding up like Jory Rojak."

Shayne shrugged. "I can take care of myself. You get your wife on that plane to California. And... check on that leak out of your office, Danny."

Danny frowned. "Jory's call came directly through to me. Unless my secretary listened in...?" He paused, not liking the thought. "She's been with me a long time, Mike. I trust her."

Shayne said, "Someone knew about my meeting with Jory besides you. It's a thought, Danny. Check it out."

IV

MIKE SHAYNE put in a call to Lucy from a public phone in the county building and told her he wouldn't be in the office until tomorrow morning. Were the Day kids settled in at the Sinbad? Lucy

said they were.

The redhead called the *Daily News*, asked for Tim Rourke. The city editor told him the ace reporter was out on assignment, but was expected back within the hour. He said he'd give Tim Shayne's message.

Evening commuter traffic was beginning to clog the city's main streets when Shayne headed back for his apartment. A long blue Chrysler Imperial swung in behind him. Shayne noticed the car as he glanced in his rear-view mirror. He remembered seeing it, or one just like it, parked in front of the county building when he had come out.

He tried to make out the man behind the wheel, but the mirror gave him only a glimpse of a hard square face either tanned or naturally dark-skinned.

A red light stopped the redhead at the corner of Flagler Avenue. The Chrysler pulled up behind him and Shayne got a closer look at the driver. Swarthy of face; he was speaking to his companion, a smaller, well-dressed man beside him. A gold tooth flashed as the driver smiled at something the other said.

Then the light changed and Shayne made the turn, watching his rear-view mirror.

The Chrysler made the turn with him. It stayed behind Shayne for a few blocks, then passed him in a burst of speed as they were

nearing Shayne's apartment hotel. Neither man in the car looked at the redhead as they went by.

Probably a false alarm, Shayne thought. But he wasn't sure. He had been tailed before. He knew the signs. The Chrysler had been waiting in front of the courthouse. It had followed him here. Passing him could be just a ruse. It was possible they had already checked him out, knew where he lived.

He swung past his hotel, made a right turn, kept going. He didn't see the Chrysler again. He began to relax. He circled the block, drove slowly down into the underground garage. There were a few cars parked in the slots. None was a Chrysler.

But the redhead didn't take any chances. He slipped his pistol into his coat pocket as he stepped out of the Buick, locked it, and headed for the elevator.

The ride to his apartment was uneventful. Shayne took off his coat, went into the kitchen, poured himself a shot of brandy.

Getting jumpy, he thought.

He kept seeing the bloodstain on the oily water by the Carey Oil Company pier, the gulls circling, screaming. What had Jory Rojak found out?

Shayne glanced at his clock. He had some time to kill. He settled in his easy chair in front of the TV, watched the evening news. There was an item about the death of an itinerant fisherman found in the water by the abandoned

Carey pier. The sheriff was close-mouthed. The name was being withheld until next of kin could be found and notified.

The phone rang.

It was Tim Rourke. The *Daily News* reporter made it short. He had done the checking Shayne requested. He'd be seeing the redhead within the hour. At the Friars, wasn't it?

The Friars was a new restaurant which claimed to serve the best corned beef and cabbage in town. Being a good Irishman, and with Saint Patrick's Day approaching, Shayne had decided to see if the bistro lived up to its billing.

It was dark when he pulled into the parking lot. An attendant dressed like a green leprechaun gave him a ticket and drove his car away.

It was properly dark inside, the lights dimmed, candles burning inside green glass holders. The bar was well occupied and bursts of laughter mingled with the clink of ice in glasses.

A buxom young waitress in skimpy shamrock costume took his order after the hostess had seated him. Shayne ordered his Martell and settled back to wait for Rourke.

The restaurant had a warm, homy atmosphere. It didn't try to look overly Irish, but they were pushing Irish coffee as an after-dinner drink, and a girl seated at a piano was playing *When Irish*

Eyes Are Smiling.

The waitress brought him his drink. Shayne toyed with his brandy for a while, waiting for Tim. The ace reporter was usually late for such meetings.

Shayne finished his brandy, ordered another and told the waitress to show Rourke to his table when he showed up.

The restrooms were back behind the bar, down a short carpeted hallway. Shayne was headed that way when two men came in, heading for the bar. They jostled the redhead as they went by, and one of them turned to look at him, scowling. He was a large man, squat but powerful. The man with him was slim, fairer skinned, well-dressed.

Shayne paused, looked back. The two men found stools at the far end of the bar and Shayne lost sight of them. They looked like the men who had been following him in the blue Chrysler. He'd have to be careful.

Tim Rourke was waiting for him when he returned to his table. The reporter had a drink in front of him. As Shayne sat down, Rourke raised his glass.

"Here's to crime," he quipped. "It keeps private investigators, newsmen and lawyers working."

Shayne was not in the mood for levity. "What did you find out on the Bostick and Bates people?"

Rourke eyed the big redhead, his tone sobering. "Something rub you the wrong way, Mike?"

Shayne shrugged.

"What were you doing at the old Carey Oil pier this morning, Mike?"

Shayne frowned. "Come again?"

Tim plucked the impaled olive from his vodka martini, chewed on it. "A newspaperman has his sources." He looked at Shayne, grinned. "Privileged information, of course."

Shayne said, "That's another matter, Tim. I want to know what you have on Gloria Bostick and Milly Bates."

Tim started to speak, paused as two boisterous men came by, drinks in their hands, following the hostess to a table beyond. They were the same two who had jostled Shayne on their way in.

The smaller man ran his cold gaze over Shayne and Rourke as they went by.

The redhead watched them. Tim turned to look. "Know them, Mike?"

"If the big one has a gold tooth up front I do," Shayne replied. He settled back. "Let's order. I'm getting hungry."

The waitress smiled prettily, praised the corned beef and cabbage, took their order and left.

"Let's see," Tim said, checking his small notebook. "Nothing on Gloria Bostick. But I remembered the name Milly Bates. Did a personality piece on her years ago. Milly Bates, retired circus performer, aerialist. Married to a man

named Jack Hanson. Captain Jack. Runs a bait-and-tackle shop with small lunchroom annex lower end of Bixcayne Bay. Also owns a couple of fishing boats which he hires out for weekends or day excursions."

Shayne said, "Well, that's a start."

He told the reporter about the Day kids. "I promised Lucy I'd help them."

Rourke grinned. "I know what you mean. A couple of orphaned kids—"

The redhead fended him off. "What are you working on?"

"Same thing you are," the reporter replied. "Gunrunning."

"Joey Cassell?"

Tim's eyes shadowed. "I'm not sure. I—"

He looked up and around as a thick voice snarled, "Hey, buddy! Your name Tim Rourke?"

Shayne turned. The same two men he had encountered by the bar were standing by their table. The squat swarthy man was talking to Rourke. He looked drunk. It could be an act, Shayne thought, tensing.

Tim shrugged.

The man's lips crinkled, showing a gold tooth. "Hotshot *Daily News* reporter?"

People at other tables were beginning to look. A waitress hurried toward the bar, whispered something to the bartender.

Shayne said, "You're creating a disturbance, fellow. Shove off!"

The squat man turned to him. "You keep out of this, buster. This is between him and me."

He made a lunge across the table, grabbed a fistful of Tim's shirt. "Ain't no damn newshawk gonna call me a liar in print!"

The smaller man with him tried to pull him away. It looked good, but it didn't fool Shayne. The small man was the one to watch.

Rourke tore himself loose. "Mike, this creep is crazy. I never saw him before."

The man tried to lunge across the table again. Shayne drove his shoulder into him, spilling him back.

The smaller man yelled, "Look out, Nick! He's got a gun!"

Shayne was on his feet, shoving the big man back. He saw the smaller man reach inside his coat, pull out a gun. The redhead spun Nick around, jammed him into the smaller man just as the gun went off.

Patrons suddenly screamed and dove for cover. Tim Rourke remained frozen in his chair. Shayne went down as the smaller man fired again, feeling the bullet tear across the back of his neck. He rolled over, drew his own gun. He heard another shot go off, then both men turned, ran for the door, shoving frightened patrons out of their way.

Shayne got to his feet. The bartender was calling the police. The waitresses were huddled together in the kitchen doorway.

"Tim!" Shayne asked. "You all right?"

Tim was white-faced. He nodded. "Who were they after? — You or me?"

It was a question Shayne could not answer.

V

CHIEF GENTRY'S jaws clamped hard on his cigar as he scowled at Shayne. "A brawl in one of our nicer restaurants, Mike! And on Saint Pat's Day yet? What will the tourists think?"

"It isn't Saint Patrick's Day yet," Mike growled. "And I didn't start it. And if you want to know what I think of the tourists—"

Gentry waved him down. "So you've got an Irish temper." He took the soggy butt from his mouth, set it down in the ash-tray. "Who were they?"

"Don't know. Never saw them before last night." The redhead frowned. "I'm still not sure if they were trying to get me — or Tim."

Gentry leaned back, lowered his voice. "You still on the Joey Cassell case?"

Shayne levelled his gaze at the Chief. "Why?"

Gentry thought a moment. "Let me give you some advice, Mike — between friends. Stay out of it!"

Shayne settled his bulk in a chair. They were alone in the chief's office, the morning sun slanting in through the window.

Last night the police had booked him and Rourke for disturbing the

peace, a miscarriage of justice if Shayne had ever seen one. Released on their own recognizance, Shayne had checked in at the local hospital emergency room to have his wound treated and bandaged. The bullet gash still smarted, made his neck feel stiff . . . and it didn't help that he had not yet been to his office. He knew Lucy would be worried.

"I went to see Danny Wickham on your sayso," Shayne reminded the Chief. "I can't pull out of it now."

"That was before I found out Danny was going all out after Joey Cassell," Gentry said. He folded his hands across his stomach, frowning slightly. "Look, Mike . . . I like Danny. And I've got nothing against a man having political aspirations. But Danny's got one bad fault. He'll use you or anyone else to get where he wants to go."

"So . . . ?"

Gentry suddenly stabbed a thick, tobacco-stained finger at Shayne. "So, stay out of it, Mike! I don't want to see you risk your neck for another man's ambition."

Shayne shook his head. "Thanks, Chief."

Gentry threw up his hands in disgust. "Guess I'm getting old, Mike. But I've seen men like Danny come and go. Full of fire and vinegar — they come into office ready to wipe out crime single-handed."

The Chief got up, walked to

his window, carrying his resentment with him. "I'm scheduled to give a talk to the Women's Auxiliary at a luncheon tomorrow. Crime prevention . . . rape. What are the police doing about it?" He paused, staring grimly out the window. "The whole world's going to hell, Mike. It's not only the Joey Cassells . . . it's all the people out there, waiting to buy what he's selling. Guns, dope, women . . ."

He turned back to look at Shayne.

Shayne said, "You, through, Will?"

Gentry shrugged.

"Thanks for the lecture," Shayne said.

Gentry's jaw tightened. "You staying on?"

"Until it's over — one way or the other."

Gentry walked back to his desk, sat down. "I didn't think you'd take my advice anyway, Mike." He waved. "Good luck. And keep your nose clean."

Shayne grinned. "Give them a nice talk, Will . . . those old ladies at the luncheon tomorrow."

VI

CINDY AND JONATHAN were on the beach, sunning themselves, when Shayne walked up. Gotcha was on a leash, looped around Jonathan's ankle.

The three of them lay on the warm sand without a care in the

world. Life, to them, was a now thing . . . a hamburger and french fries, a place to sleep, Jonathan's guitar. For a moment Shayne envied them.

Cindy turned to look as Shayne came up to them. She was wearing a string bikini which barely covered the strategic areas of her body.

"Hi," she greeted. "Find out anything?"

Jonathan was wearing a pair of trunks. There were catsup stains on his bare chest. A cardboard boat containing the remains of a hamburger and french fries lay within reach of his hand.

"Get your clothes on," Shayne said. "We're going for a ride."

The word ride evidently stirred memories in the airedale. He perked his ears, barked expectantly.

Cindy sat up, her eyes sparkling. "You've found my mother?"

"Your great-aunt Milly Gates," Shayne replied. He turned his attention to Jonathan, who was fishing for the last of the fries.

"Don't you ever eat anything else?" Shayne asked.

"Dogs," Jonathan said. "With chili."

Mike Shayne drove them back to the Sinbad, a couple of blocks away, waited in the car while they showered, changed into the faded Levi's and T-shirts which appeared to be their wardrobe. These T-shirts, however, bore the lettering *Stop The Sealers*.

It was a two-hour ride down the

Bay side, most of it, once beyond the environs of Miami, past encroaching swampland.

Shayne had the windows down and Cindy's blonde hair blew in the breeze. Jonathan rode in back with Gotcha and his guitar, his two prized possessions.

For Shayne this was a diversion. Get Cindy reunited with her mother, and off his back. He glanced at the girl beside him. Her eyes were shining with excitement. Shayne hoped, for her sake, Milly Bates would be the answer.

Captain Jack's place lay just south of Coral Gables, on the two-lane swamp road fronting the Bay. There was a general store on the corner, with a couple of gasoline pumps, a branch post office, and some old tourist cabins. Shayne made inquiries inside the store and was told Captain Jack's place was about a half-mile down a dirt road, right smack on the Bay.

A couple of vehicles were parked on the white crushed-rock parking area — a battered pickup with the door lettered *Captain Jack's* and a Cadillac with New York plates.

The old frame building was anchored to the land, but jugged out over the Bay, resting on pilings. A recent addition was the lunchroom, the wood still new, unpainted. Bright yellow curtains decorated the windows.

Fishnets, pots and giant clamshells landscaped the front of Cap-

tain Jack's. An old rotting stiff rested under a moss-laden tree. Gulls perched on the roof, keeping their distance from a solitary pelican who stared unblinkingly down at Shayne as he and Cindy Day came up the ground clamshell walk. Jonathan had elected to remain in the car with Gotcha.

A man and a woman were inside, talking to Captain Jack, a tall, spare-framed, white-haired man with faded blue eyes, a lean, weatherbeaten face, hands gnarled and rope-burned.

The man, evidently the Cadillac owner, was doing the talking. His wife, a tiny woman in her early fifties, was listening.

"Look," the man was saying, "I came all the way down here from New York for some sport fishing. I was told you were the best on the Bay." He jabbed a finger toward a half dozen framed and autographed black-and-white photos mounted on the wall. "Isn't that Hemingway? Dos Passos? John Kennedy?"

Captain Jack cut him off. "I'm sorry," he said bluntly. "You should have made reservations in advance."

"I *did*!" the man snapped. He was red-faced, angry . . . a man used to authority. "I sent a letter, then a telegram . . ."

Captain Jack's face hardened. "I'm sorry, Mister Crawford. But I'm all tied up for the next three days. Come back later. Maybe next week . . ."

"Hell with you!" the man barked. He turned to his wife. "Come on, Julie," he snapped. "There're other places."

They marched past Shayne and Cindy Day and went outside. Captain Jack turned to the redhead, who was admiring one of the photographs on the wall. It was a picture of a grizzled Ernest Hemingway posing with his catch, a fairsized marlin. Hemingway had written across the bottom of the photo, *Thanks, Jack*, and signed his name.

"Good writer, hard drinker and damn fine fisherman," Jack said. "Too bad he checked out the way he did."

Shayne turned his attention to the sun-browned man. Jack had a deceptively soft voice, washed-out blue eyes. But under that sinewy spare frame lurked a toughness that belied his years.

"You looking for a charter?" he asked Shayne, but his gaze was on Cindy as he asked.

"No," the redhead said. "Just a little information. Your wife was Milly Bates?"

Jack frowned. "Yes." His glance slid off toward the lunchroom door through which Shayne, following his look, could see a slender gray-haired woman setting places on the tables.

"You another reporter?" Jack's gaze levelled on Shayne.

Shayne shook his head.

"Didn't think so," Jack said. "Too much muscle."

Cindy pushed up beside Shayne. "I'm, looking for my mother. She came here to stay with Aunt Milly."

Jack frowned. "You must have the wrong Bates, girl. No one's staying with us. There are just the two of us." He pointed at the woman, who had come to the lunchroom doorway.

"Oh, I don't mean now," Cindy said. "She came here a long time ago. I'm Cindy Day. But my mother's name was Gloria Bostick."

Shayne caught a small shock of surprise in Jack's pale eyes, saw his gnarled hands tighten. He swung around, saw Milly Hanson stiffen, press back against the framing, her fingers twisting in her apron pocket.

"Sorry," Jack said harshly. "No one named Gloria Bates ever came here."

"*Jack!*" The woman's voice cut through his denial. "It's all *right*, Jack."

She came toward them, a woman in her fifties, still trim, athletic, her face browned and wrinkled from too much sun, her hair white, thinning. Birdbright eyes darting, watchful, judging.

"I'm Milly Bates. I was until I married Jack. I knew your mother as a young girl. Irene — that was Gloria's mother — and I worked for Ringling in the old days." She smiled. "We were just friends, not sisters. But Gloria always called me Aunt Milly."

"She *did* come here to see you?" Cindy said.

"Oh, yes. Let's see . . ." She turned to Jack. "That was just before we got married . . . or right after. Hmm . . . She stayed with us for a little while . . ."

"*Oh!*" Cindy's voice was disappointed. "Then she isn't here?"

"She left about a year later. She looked quite upset about something when she arrived, wouldn't talk about it. We helped her get back on her feet, then she left for New York."

"New York?" There was dismay in Cindy's voice.

"You have her address?" Shayne asked.

Milly turned her gaze to him. "I did. We got one letter from her, saying she was settled, had a job. Then . . . nothing. I wrote to her a couple of times but my letters came back, stamped address unknown."

She smiled at her husband. "That's why Jack answered you the way he did. He's never forgiven Gloria for that."

Cindy looked crushed. "New York . . .?" she repeated. She looked at Shayne like a hurt child asking for help.

"I'm awfully sorry, my dear," Milly said. "I didn't know Gloria had a daughter. She didn't mention it while she was here . . ."

Shayne said, "Well, thanks anyway, Mrs. Hanson." He took Cindy by the arm. "Come on, Cindy."

They went outside. The Cadillac was gone. Gotcha barked at them as they approached the Buick. He was alone in the car, tied to the wheel.

A hard voice reached Shayne, coming from somewhere around the corner of the bait shop. "Get out and stay out, kid! Don't ever come around here again!"

Shayne took a step toward the side of the building, stopped as Jonathan backed into view, turned, ran toward the Buick. Behind him a man in deck clothes appeared briefly, pulled back quickly when he saw Shayne.

Shayne untied the airedale and Jonathan scrambled into the back seat with the dog as Cindy slid in beside Mike.

The big redhead wheeled the Buick around, headed back for the highway.

"What was that all about?" Shayne asked.

"Beats me," Jonathan said. "I thought I'd take a look around while you and Cindy were inside. I like boats. There were two of them docked behind the building. Fishing boats, flying bridges . . . just like I saw in the yachting magazines my dad used to buy. Fifty-footers, I'd say. Couple of deckhands were working on the engines. One of them ran me off."

Shayne was trying to place the glimpse he had caught of the deckhand. It eluded him, leaving him annoyed.

"You find your mother?"

Jonathan asked Cindy.

She was sitting beside Shayne, staring straight ahead. All the expectancy had gone out of her. "No," she said. "I guess she never wanted me to find her."

VII

SHAYNE DROPPED Cindy and Jonathan off at the Sinbad. Cindy was shattered. "New York. It's such a *big* city . . ."

"Stick around," Shayne told her. "I've got some contacts in the Big Apple. I'll do some checking for you first."

Cindy's deep blue eyes turned on him. "You've already done too much, Mr. Shayne."

"Mike," the big redhead said. "Call me Uncle Mike."

A dimple showed in Cindy's cheek. "We can't pay you. We don't have any money."

"Saw a sign for a busboy in a window down the street," Jonathan volunteered. "I'll take the job."

"That's fine," Shayne said. "Keep you off the beach, anyway."

Cindy leaned over the car door, kissed Shayne on the cheek. "Thanks, Uncle Mike."

He watched them go into the motel, then drove back to the office. Lucy was waiting for him. He told her what had happened at Captain Jack's.

"Poor kid," Lucy said sympathetically. "What will she do now?"

"Stay here at the Sinbad until I sort things out for her. But I've got something else to do first.

"Oh," Lucy cut in. "That woman called again."

"What woman?"

"She didn't give me any name. Called earlier this morning, then again just a few minutes ago." Lucy checked her memo pad. "She wants you to call this number at five o'clock sharp." She tore the sheet from the memo pad, handed it to Shayne.

Shayne glanced at it. The prefix indicated Miami Beach. He shoved the paper in his pocket. He didn't need another client. And especially not a nervous woman client. He checked his watch. It was now three o'clock. "If she calls again, ask who she is and what she wants. Then tell her I'm all tied up for the next three weeks."

He took the elevator down to the ground floor and headed for the parking lot. A man crouched by the rear wheel of his Buick. Shayne could hear the hiss of escaping air as he approached.

"Hey!" he called. "What in hell are you doing?"

The man turned his face to Shayne. It was sharp, pock-marked, ugly.

Shayne reached down to grab the man. That was all he remembered...

The redhead came to in the

back seat of a big car. The weasel-faced man was driving. A bigger man with the flattened nose and cauliflower ears of an ex-pug sat beside him. He was holding a gun in his lap. He looked at Shayne.

"Took you a while to come around," he said. "Didn't think I hit yuh that hard."

The back of Shayne's head throbbed. He glanced out the window. They were crossing the Bay to the Miami Beach side.

"Where are we going?"

"Joey Cassell wants to talk to you," the ex-pug said.

Shayne settled back and rode the rest of the way in silence. Neither of the two men talked.

They rode up the coast for miles, finally turned off the highway toward the ocean. A mile or so farther and the car pulled up before ten-foot iron gates. A gate-man opened up for them and they drove up a gravel driveway for another two hundred feet and parked in front of a sprawling adobe house.

Shayne was hustled up the steps and into the house, down a cool tiled hallway into a large study. There were Persian rugs on the floor, floor-to-ceiling bookcases, a life-sized nude oil painting of a Las Vegas showgirl hanging in an expensive gold frame over the fireplace.

Joey Cassell watched as his two men came in with Shayne. He was sitting behind a large mahogany

desk, soft-collared shirt open at the neck. He looked like a very successful business man on vacation. Light gray slacks, Gucci loafers, a pleasant smile on his face.

"Sit down, Shayne." He waved to a chair.

Shayne remained standing. The ex-pug took a step toward the redhead, scowling.

"It's all right, Jocko," Joey said. "He can stand if he wants." He waved. "You and Gino wait outside by the pool."

This was the first time Shayne had had a close look at the Syndicate man. Joey was in his fifties, but only a little gray showed in his hair and his tanned face was all but unwrinkled. He looked fit and, to give the devil his due, handsome.

Joey leaned forward across his desk. "You *are* the famous Mike Shayne, aren't you?" He smiled. "I always wanted to meet you."

"Sorry I can't return the pleasure," Shayne snapped.

Joey leaned back, spread his hands. "Jocko must have used force. But I guess you wouldn't have come if he hadn't."

"I'll remember that," Shayne said grimly.

"Come on, sit down," Joey said. "I want to ask you something." He waited a moment as the redhead settled in the big wing chair.

"Why are you bothering me, Shayne?"

Shayne was irritated. "You?"

Joey nodded. "Joey Cassell! Everywhere . . . in the papers. . . on TV . . . in pool halls and at the race track. Joey Cassell! Some punk is found floating in an oil drum off Miami Beach . . . Joey Cassell! Somebody starts running black market guns through Miami and —"

"Joey Cassell!" Mike put in bluntly.

The Syndicate man threw up his hands. "See what I mean?"

He stood up, walked to a large picture window, looked out across an expanse of lawn and flowering shrubs to the ocean beyond.

"I heard a lot about you," Joey continued. "That's why I asked my boys to bring you here." He turned. "I'm a *retired* businessman. I like it here. I don't want trouble."

Joey walked slowly back to his desk, sat on a corner of it, eyed Shayne.

"I've got a proposition for you," he said. "You work for me. Find out who's running those black market guns down here and blaming it on me."

Shayne studied the man. Was it a joke?

"You're a private eye," Joey said. "How much do you get? One hundred — two hundred — a day? More?"

He went behind his desk, pulled a manila envelope out of a drawer.

"How much, Shayne?"

"Two-fifty a day and expenses," Shayne answered.

"You're underpaid," Joey said. "You find out who's making trouble for Joey Cassell and I pay you five hundred and expenses."

He tossed the manila envelope on the desk in front of Shayne. "Call me when you have something."

Shayne said, "I'm free to go?"

"Sure." Joey pressed a button under his desk and a buzzer sounded outside. Gino and Jock came into the room.

"Drive Mr. Shayne back to town," Joey said. "And no rough stuff, Jocko."

Shayne headed for the door. Joey called out: "Hey, Shayne. You forgot your money."

"I'll bill you later," Shayne said.

VIII

IT WAS beginning to get dark by the time Joey's men dropped Shayne off at his office parking lot. Lucy had gone home.

Shayne replaced his flat tire with the spare, drove down to the corner gas station, filled up on gas, had the oil level and water checked and air pumped into his flat tire.

He was driving with headlights on by the time he turned into his hotel garage, parked the Buick and went up to his apartment.

He was tired, his neck and head ached, and he was hungry. He was also angry.

Someone had tried to kill him at

the Friars last night. Some more of Joey's men? He tried to place the swarthy face with the gold tooth. Nick, his companion had called him. Nick the Greek! The identification came to Shayne then . . . a shady waterfront character. A man up for hire. Not one of Joey's men. Or was he?

He took a steak out of the refrigerator, slipped it under the broiler, opened a package of peas and carrots and put them into a saucepan atop the range. There was still some potato salad in a cardboard container to go along with the steak.

Shayne poured himself a measure of Martell while the steak was getting ready and settled down to think. Joey Cassell hiring him, Shayne, to find out who was running black-market guns through Miami! Now, that was a twist!

He reached inside his pocket for his cigarettes and found the crumpled telephone number Lucy had given him. Shayne stared at it for a moment. It was long after five, but he decided to give it a try.

A male voice, professionally courteous, answered. "Clarion Hotel. What can I do for you?"

His Miami Beach guess was right, anyway, Shayne thought. The Clarion was a small but good hotel with a small park front.

He said he wanted to talk to the woman in Room 303. That was the extension number she had given Lucy.

"I'm sorry," the desk clerk answered. "But Mrs. Bostick checked out an hour ago."

Shayne's fingers tightened on the phone. It took a moment for the name to sink in. "Mrs. Bostick?" he said slowly. "Gloria Bostick?"

"Yes. She left not quite an hour ago."

"Thanks," Shayne said, and hung up.

Gloria Bostick — Cindy's mother? It couldn't be. She was in New York, wasn't she? Or had she come back to Miami without letting Milly Bates know? Why?

And why call him? Did she know her daughter was in Miami, looking for her?

The phone rang.

Shayne stared grimly at it for a moment before picking up the receiver.

A man's cold voice said: "Shayne?"

The redhead recognized the hard, cold timbre — *the killer on the old Carey Oil pier!*

"Yeah . . . Shayne," Mike answered.

"You have a friend named Tim Rourke. Works for the *Daily News*?"

Shayne didn't reply to this.

"He's got a long nose," the man said.

Shayne's anger broke loose. "What do you want?"

"You want to see your news-hawk friend again, you take a vacation. A long one, Shayne." The

man chuckled, but there was no warmth in it. "Go to Disneyworld. Better yet, go to the Islands." There was a long pause, then: "*Capice?*"

There was a click as the man hung up. Shayne slowly set his receiver down.

Tim had told him he was working on the gunrunning story. What had he found out? Tim could be close-mouthed when he was on a big newsbreak.

Shayne dialed Tim's apartment. He heard the phone ring, waited for Rourke to answer. It kept ringing, and after a while it seemed to have a hollow, frightening sound.

Behind Shayne, in the kitchen, his steak began to burn. He hung up and went to its rescue.

Shayne tried calling the *Daily News* the next morning. Tim came on the line, his voice sounding bright and cheerful.

"How are the Day kids, Mike?"

"Staying home, where they belong," Shayne growled.

"Where were you last night?"

There was a pause at the other end of the line, then: "Can't tell you, Mike. Not just yet."

"You'd better," the private investigator told him. "I got a call last night — from the man who killed Jory Rojak!"

Tim's low whistle came over the line. "Yeah?"

"He advised me to take a long vacation, away from Miami. And he had a message for you. Keep

your long nose out of whatever you've been doing lately."

Tim chuckled. "Looks like we got them scared, eh, Mike?"

"I don't know about *them*," Shayne snapped. "But if I were you, I wouldn't go down any dark alleys!"

Tim's voice lowered. "Look, Mike . . . I think I'm onto something. I just found out there's a new shipment of black market guns coming in from up north. I don't know how they're coming in yet, or just where they're going to be offloaded. But . . ." He paused, then, "You ever hear of a man named Matt Spinks?"

"Why?"

"Small-time hood. Used to work for Joey Cassell. Checked the morgue. Fits the description of the man who killed Rojak. Hey, you listening?" Tim asked.

"Both ears," Shayne growled.

"Those two jokers in the Friars. The one who tried to pick a fight with me is Nick the Greek. The other is Lew Caney. Friends of Matt Spinks."

"They still work for Joey?"

"Don't know," Tim replied. "Tell you when I find out more."

"Watch your step," Shayne growled. "Murder comes easy these days. And I've got a feeling they're not impressed by the power of the press."

He hung up, relieved that Tim Rourke was okay. But as to keeping his nose out of it, Shayne wasn't too sure. The ace reporter

never gave up on a story, once he got on it.

IX

SHAYNE STOPPED at a coffee shop for breakfast before going on to his office. Lucy was going through the billing when Shayne walked in, slammed the door behind him and headed for his office.

Lucy looked up, smiled. "Bad night, Michael?"

The redhead scowled at her.

"That woman called again," Lucy said. "Just a few minutes ago."

"Gloria Bostick?"

"She didn't say." Lucy eyed Shayne. "Is that her name?"

Shayne ignored the question. "What did she want?"

"She wanted to know where Cindy Day was staying."

Shayne leaned over her desk. "And you told her?"

"Yes. She's Cindy's mother, isn't she?" Then, worriedly, "Shouldn't I have?"

Shayne whirled, headed for the door. She called out after him. "*Michael!* She is the girl's mother—!"

Shayne was gone before she finished. Lucy got up, closed the door, stood looking back across the small office. There had been an urgency in Shayne that sent a shiver of fear through her. She went back to her desk, picked up the phone, and put in a call to Sinbad.

Shayne had an account with the Sinbad. Sometimes he put up friends there who came to visit him. Margie, the desk clerk, was an older woman who knew him from way back.

"Your secretary called, just before you came in," she told Shayne. "She wanted to know about the Day kids."

"They're still here?"

She shook her head. "Your secretary seemed quite upset when I told her. The boy's out somewhere, with his dog. Beach, probably—"

"Cindy?" Shayne snapped. "Where did she go?"

"A man came for her about an hour ago. He said he was her uncle from New York. She went with him willingly."

Shayne's powerful fingers gripped the counter edge. "What did the man look like, Margie? Narrow-faced, small scar on his cheek?"

"Something like that." Margie's voice was troubled. "I was busy. I didn't pay much attention. But the girl didn't seem to be in any trouble."

Behind her the phone rang. Margie answered it, turned, extended it to Mike. "For you."

It was Lucy.

"That woman called here again, right after you left. She sounded very upset, wanted to get in touch with you. I told her you had gone to the Sinbad."

"She leave a number where I

can call her?"

"No. She hung up right away."

Shayne said, "Thanks, Lucy," and hung up. He had expected the woman who called herself Gloria Bostick to have come for Cindy. But Matt Spinks had beaten them to the girl.

How had Spinks found out about Cindy? And what did she mean to him, anyway? Or Gloria Bostick? And where did Joey Cassell figure in on this? It didn't make sense . . . not yet, anyway.

Margie said, "Is the girl in trouble, Mike?"

"I don't know," Shayne replied.

He went outside, glanced up toward the sun. It was getting on toward noon. He started down the palm-shaded walk to his car, parked at the curb.

There was a woman waiting for him, sitting in the front seat of the Buick. The redhead paused, watched her for a long moment. It was Helen Wickham!

He walked to the car, looked down at her. Mrs. Wickham's face was drawn. There were circles under her eyes.

"Get in," she said, her voice ragged. "Get in, Shayne."

He knew, then, who she was. He leaned over the car door, said, "You're Gloria Bostick!"

Her eyes darkened and pain tugged briefly at the corners of her mouth. Then her hand came out of her handbag, holding a small, nickel-plated revolver.

"Get in!" she ordered.

Shayne eyed the gun, read the look of desperation in Helen Wickham's face. He opened the door, slid in behind the wheel.

"Miami Beach," the woman said. "The old Clarion Hotel. You know the way."

Puffs of white clouds scudded across the sky over the Bay and a fifteen-knot breeze ruffled whitecaps on the water as Shayne headed across the bridge. Helen Wickham sat stiffly on the seat beside him, the gun held tightly in her lap, staring across the Bay to the high-rises of Miami Beach.

"Yes," she answered dully, "I am Cindy's mother. Gloria Bostick."

Shayne waited for her to continue.

"I haven't seen her since she was two months old," the woman said. There was anguish in her voice. "I gave her up for adoption. I never thought I'd see her again."

"Or ever want to?" Shayne's question was bluntly direct.

She was honest. "No. I didn't want her coming into my life. Not now." She looked into Shayne's face. "Eighteen years, Shayne. I don't know her." Then the hardness in her voice crumpled. "But she *is* my daughter . . ."

"Who told you?" Shayne asked. "About Cindy? Your Aunt Milly?"

"She isn't my aunt," Helen said. "But I called her that. And when Cindy was born, I had no other place to go."

They were moving with the flow of traffic across the causeway. Miami Beach loomed up ahead.

"Put that gun away," Shayne said. "You won't need it."

Helen stared down at the gun in her lap, as though she had forgotten she had it. She slipped it back inside her bag.

"Does your husband know?" the big redhead asked. "About Cindy?"

"No." Helen's voice was strained, uncertain. "I came to live with Aunt Milly and Captain Jack. They were good to me. I went to night school, took a secretarial course, got a job in the D.A.'s office. Danny was just getting started then. We got married. I thought my past was behind me. I even changed my name to Helen Bates."

Shayne's thoughts drifted to Cindy . . . suntanned, young, bright, cheerful and naive. "*I hope my mother will like me,*" she had said.

"Why?" Helen said, her voice bitter. "Why did she come looking for me now?"

"The people who adopted her are dead," Shayne told her. "Killed in an auto accident. You're all she has now, except for Jonathan."

"Jonathan?"

"The Days had a son, a year older than Cindy. Your daughter and he grew up together." Shayne glanced at Helen. "He was out somewhere when a man came to

the Sinbad, took Cindy away."

"I know," Helen said bitterly.

"Joey Cassell!"

"You sure?"

She nodded. "Not Joey in person. One of his men. Joey's behind the gunrunning. He's threatened to kill me if I didn't stop Danny's investigation."

They swung in off the causeway, turned left up Collins Avenue. The high-rise buildings on the right blocked off their view of the ocean.

"I didn't expect ever to see my daughter," Helen repeated. "But she's here . . . and Joey Cassell found out about her. He tried to use me to stop Danny. Now he has her."

Shayne pulled up before the old Clarion Hotel.

"You know my husband," Helen said. "It'll kill him if he has to stop going after Joey. But I'm asking you, for Cindy's sake, to pull out of the investigation. Leave things be."

Something that had been bothering the redheaded private investigator made him ask, "Why does your husband hate Joey Cassell? I mean over and above a district attorney's normal antagonism to men who break the law?"

Helen looked down at her hands, folded nervously across her handbag. She was silent for a long moment, making up her mind if she should answer.

"I was Joey's girl . . . for a while. One of many, I found out

later. It was before I met Danny."

"Danny knows that?"

She nodded, biting her lips.

"Joey let him know . . . some time ago. He's that kind of man."

She opened the door, slipped out.

Shayne said, "What about Cindy?"

"I'll tell Danny. Joey won't hurt her. All he wants is to get my husband off his back. And you, too, Shayne."

Maybe, Shayne thought grimly as he watched her head toward the hotel. *Maybe* . . .

X

FROM THE CLARION it was an hour's drive north to Joey Cassell's place. The iron gates were closed when Shayne nosed up to them. The hard-faced gatekeeper eyed Shayne from the gatehouse.

"I'm Shayne," the redhead said. "I work for Joey Cassell. Tell him I want to see him."

The gateman stepped back inside the gatehouse, called the house.

Shayne waited.

A few minutes later Jocko came down the driveway toward the gate. He stopped just inside the driveway, eyed Shayne, sneered, "What do you want, Hawkshaw?"

"None of your business," Shayne said. "I'm here to see Joey."

The ex-pug cocked his bullet head to one side, raked Shayne with an insolent stare. "Well now,

it's Joey, eh? Buddy-buddy with the boss, eh?" He jerked his thumb toward the road back of Shayne. "On your way, buster! Joey's tied up today. He said come back tomorrow."

Shayne got a grip on his temper. "All right. Give him this message. It's important."

He reached slowly inside his coat pocket, took out an envelope, held it close to the gate.

The big man scowled, thrust his right arm through an opening in the grillwork, reaching for the envelope. Shayne's fingers clamped down on Jocko's wrist, jammed his arm against the iron bars, bringing a snarl of pain to the expug's lips.

The gateman froze for a moment, then jerked around for the shotgun in the gatehouse. The big redhead's deadly voice stopped him. "You lay a hand on that shotgun and I blow you wide open!"

The gateman turned slowly back to face Shayne, who had drawn his .38 and had him targeted. Jocko was twisting desperately, trying to get free or reach for the gun in his shoulder holster.

Shayne jammed Jocko's hand harder against the bars, bringing the man to his knees.

"Open up," he snapped. "And be careful how you do it."

The gateman reached gingerly inside the gatehouse, touched a button. The gate swung inward, Jocko stumbling back with it as Shayne released his hold and

stepped quickly inside.

Jocko was nursing his bone-bruised right arm as Shayne jerked him around, took his automatic from his shoulder holster, and shoved him back.

He walked to the gatehouse, reached inside, closed the iron gates, picked up the double-barreled shotgun. The barrels had been sawed off to within eighteen inches of the stock, making it a highly effective weapon at close quarters. Shayne checked to see if it was loaded. It was.

He took the clip out of Jocko's automatic, ejected the load still in the chamber, shoved them in his pocket. He handed the gun back to Jocko, turned to the gateman.

"Tell Joey I'm coming in," he said.

Jocko was eyeing the gun in the big redhead's fist. Shayne slipped the Magnum back into its holster, motioned with the shotgun.

"Let's go," he said. "I don't want to keep my buddy Joey waiting."

Joey Cassell met them at the front door. There were several black limousines parked on the strip by the garage. One of them had out-of-state license plates.

Joey looked irritated. "You're bothering me, Shayne."

The redhead eyed him coldly.

"Am I, now?" He shoved Jocko on ahead of him. "I'm in your employ, remember?"

"All right," Joey snapped. "Make it short. I've got a business conference going."

"Let's settle this one first," Shayne retorted. "I've got a business proposition for you." He motioned with the shotgun. "Inside, in private, Joey."

Joey studied the angry redhead for a moment, ran his thumb down the side of his chin, nodded. "It's all right, Jocko. Go back to your card game."

"Yeah," Shayne said wickedly. "Get lost, Jocko."

He hit a nerve, which is what the redhead wanted. Jocko reacted with a snarl, came at him, swinging. Shayne sidestepped, brought the stock of the shotgun up in an arc against Jocko's jaw. The expug went down to his knees, then fell face forward.

Joey shook his head. "He'll never learn, I guess." He turned to Shayne. "Well, let's get on with it."

Mike followed the Syndicate man into a glass-walled patio overlooking the pool. There was a large glass-topped table with several iron-framed chairs and a bamboo bar against the inner wall.

Joey sat down, waved Shayne to the bar. "Help yourself," he invited. He glanced at his wristwatch. "It better be important, Shayne."

Shayne laid the shotgun down on the chair beside him. "Where's the girl?"

Joey sat for a moment, looking at him, frowning. "Girl?" His gaze shifted to the pool where a girl in a topless bikini was sunning herself. Dark sunglasses protected her eyes. It was not Cindy.

"Cindy Day," Shayne said.

Joey's frown deepened. He took a long cigarette from a flat cardboard box, tapped the end lightly on the tabletop, lighted up.

"Come on, Shayne," he said coldly. "No games, huh? Who's Cindy Day? Girlfriend of yours?"

"Gloria Bostick's daughter." He saw the flicker of surprise in Joey's eyes, added, "You remember Gloria Bostick, don't you?"

Joey nodded slowly, his eyes cold now, watching Shayne. "What do you know about Gloria?"

"Enough," Shayne said. "Your girl once. Danny Wickham's wife now."

Joey butted his cigarette out, shrugged. "Gloria had a daughter, eh? She never told me."

"A tradeoff," Shayne snapped. "Turn Cindy over to me and I pull out of the gunrunning case."

Joey shook his head, his eyes bland now, his thoughts hidden.

"I thought you were a smart private eye, Shayne," he said. "Heard you were the best. But this time you've been taken."

He froze as Shayne picked up

the shotgun, cocked the twin hammers back.

"The girl," Shayne said.

Joey began to sweat. "Don't be a fool, Shayne! You'd never make it out of this house alive!"

"Maybe," the big redhead admitted. "But you wouldn't know it."

Joey started to reach in his inside coat pocket for a handkerchief, stiffened as the shotgun leveled on him. "*Christ!*" he snarled weakly. "All I want is a handkerchief. I don't carry a gun. I'm a business man."

Shayne watched as Joey pulled out a white handkerchief, mopped his face.

"Who told you I had . . . uh, this Cindy girl?"

"Her mother. She's ready to call her husband off the gunrunning investigation. Just let her daughter go."

"What makes you think I have her daughter, besides her sayso?"

"Matt Spinks," Shayne said. "One of your goons. He picked her up this morning."

Joey sighed. "Matt Spinks. I should have got rid of him the day the gunrunning started, Shayne. But it was none of my business. Until the day bodies started showing up and rumors began linking Joey Cassell to the killings and the gunrunning."

He lit another cigarette, blew smoke toward the ceiling. "I kept out of it. A gang war here in Miami wouldn't do me any good.

I figured the local police would track down who was black-marketing the guns soon enough. That was, until a politically ambitious assistant D.A. began trying to pin it on me."

He got up, walked over to the windows overlooking the pool. "I hired you to find out who was behind the smear campaign, Shayne — the man behind the gunrunning. You say Matt Spinks. He doesn't work for me, not any more. If *he's* behind it, *prove* it!"

Joey swung around to face the redhead. "I don't have Gloria's daughter, Cindy, whoever *she* is. I've got bigger things cooking than kidnapping some young chick and trying to put the squeeze on Danny Wickham through his wife."

Shayne studied the Syndicate man. If Joey was lying, he was a hell of an actor.

"You don't believe me, Shayne?"

Shayne got to his feet. "Should I?"

"Look," Joey snapped, "If I had this Cindy chick and was using her to pressure you and Danny Wicham, why would I take you up on your tradeoff?"

Shayne thought it over, decided it had merit. He eased the shotgun hammers down, broke the barrel, plucked the shells out, slipped them into his pocket. He laid the shotgun down on the glass-topped table.

"If you're lying," he said evenly, nailing the older man with a grim look, "I'll be back."

Joey's white teeth showed in a small smile against his tanned face.

"Sure," he said, breathing easier. "I believe you, Shayne."

He waited until Shayne was almost out the door when he said, "That Cindy girl, Shayne . . . what's she like?"

Shayne turned, slid his gaze down to the girl by the pool.

"Not your type," he said coldly. "Not your type at all, Joey!"

XI

SHAYNE DROVE back to Miami, stopped in a coffee shop for steak and eggs and coffee. The waitress was a slim, touched-up blonde in her late thirties, a divorcee. Her name was Gerty, which was used defiantly. She and Shayne were on familiar terms; the redhead was a long-time customer.

She brought Shayne his coffee first, asked with a glint in her eye, "With or without today, Mike?"

"With," he said. "Make it half and half."

"Must have had a hard day," she said. She took his cup and disappeared in the back with it.

When she came back and set it down in front of him the brandy in it brought a grin to his face. Gerty kept a bottle of Martell in her locker for him.

He drank the coffee, then went

to the phone by the rest rooms, put in a call to the office.

Lucy was obviously upset, but she kept control of her voice. "You'd better come on in," she said after Mike told her what had happened. "Jonathan's been underfoot all day. He's taking it badly, Michael."

"Let me talk to him."

"Can't. I just sent him out for some hamburgers."

"All right. Tell him I'll be right there."

Shayne went back to the counter. His steak and eggs were ready. Gerty had replenished his coffee. He left a sizeable tip when he went.

Jonathan was curled up in a chair, Yoga fashion, strumming his guitar, when Shayne walked in. Gotcha barked a greeting. Lucy sighed, said, "You look all right, Michael."

Jonathan unwound himself, said: "You find Cindy?"

The redhead shook his head. "Get me Danny Wickham's office on the phone," he said and went on by, into his office.

He plunked down in his chair and a moment later his desk phone light blinked on. He picked up the receiver. Danny's tone sounded grim.

"Yeah, Shayne? What do you want?"

"Your wife call you this morning?"

There was a moment's silence, then, "No. Why?"

Shayne considered what he should tell Danny.

Wickham's voice was sharp: "Something happen to Helen?"

"Car trouble, I guess," Shayne replied. "I gave her a lift this morning to Miami Beach. The old Clarion Hotel. I thought she'd call you."

"What in the devil are you getting at?" Danny snapped. "My wife doesn't drive. Never has. Always takes a taxi. And what's this about the Clarion?"

Shayne didn't answer. He hung up slowly, leaned back to think. Then he checked his Clarion number, put in a call to the desk, asked for Gloria Bostick. He was told Gloria had checked out a couple of days ago.

Shayne plucked at his left earlobe, frowning as the pieces slowly began to come together. Jonathan opened the door and moved to come inside. Shayne jerked a hard thumb toward the door. "Out, Joniathan!"

The boy hesitated, backed off, closed the door.

Shayne put in a call to the Wickham house. There was no answer.

He hung up, stared thoughtfully up at the ceiling. The light on his phone blinked. He picked up the receiver. It was Danny Wickham.

"Damn it, Shayne . . . where's Helen? She hasn't been home all day. Where did you pick her up?"

Shayne cut him off. "I'll explain later. Sit tight. Don't make any

rash moves. And leave Joey Cassell alone . . . he isn't mixed in this."

He hung up again, put in a call to Chief Gentry. He had to wait before Gentry came on the line.

"I need your help," Shayne said. "I want a stakeout set up on Highway One, just south of Coral Gables."

"That's not in my jurisdiction," Gentry growled.

"You know the sheriff," Shayne said. "Talk to him. Get a couple of highway patrol cars out there."

"What are you up to?"

Shayne told him.

Gentry thought it over. "You're guessing, Shayne. If you're wrong, I get egg on my face."

"If I'm right, you get a medal," Shayne growled. "Will you do it?"

Gentry said: "You know damn well I will."

Shayne hung up, checked the loads in his Magnum, went into the other office. "Come on, Jonathan," he growled.

Jonathan brightened.

"Leave your guitar here," Shayne said. "The dog, too. Lucy will take care of him, won't you, Lucy?"

Lucy read the look on the red-head's face, knew it was no time to argue. She nodded.

"Take care of yourselves," she said as they went out.

With the lights of Miami behind them, the stars shone brightly

in a black sky. A half moon sent shimmers of light dancing on the swamp waters, made ghosts out of the cypresses reaching out with moss-dripping limbs.

A fair amount of traffic pounded down Highway One. Trucks heading south, others coming north. Small trucks, semis, double-trailer rigs. Produce trucks heading for markets, oil tankers heading north.

They went through Coral Gables and Shayne looked for a police stakeout. He didn't see any. His lips tightened. It was possible Gentry hadn't been able to convince the local sheriff's office.

Jonathan had remained silent most of the way down. But he glanced at Shayne now, said: "Where are we going?"

Shayne didn't answer.

He swung in off the highway, toward the Bay. Jonathan leaned forward, staring ahead. "Captain Jack's?"

Shayne eased the Buick off the frontage road and pulled up in the shadows behind the general store. Captain Jack's place was a half-mile down the dirt road toward the Bay.

"You know how to drive?" he whispered to Jonathan.

Jonathan nodded.

"Wait here. If I'm not back in thirty minutes, you get back on the Highway and head for Coral Gables. Floor it. Blow your horn! You'll have a patrol car on your tail in minutes. Get them down to

Captain Jack's in a hurry!"

"I don't have a watch," Jonathan said.

"There's one on the dashboard," Shayne told him. He shoved a dollar into Jonathan's hand. "Go inside, buy yourself a Coke. Look natural. If someone asks, you're waiting for a girl . . . whatever."

Jonathan said, "I want to see Cindy." There was a quiet stubbornness to his voice.

"You'll see her," Shayne promised.

He left the keys in the ignition, stepped out of the car. He figured it would take him ten minutes to get to Captain Jack's. Ten minutes to look around.

Headlights danced across the parking area in front of the store as a big truck rumbled to a stop by the door. The cab door opened and a man stepped down and went inside the store. He came out a moment later with the owner, a fat woman with a ten-year-old boy beside her.

They paused by the door and the woman said: "That was a bad batch you brought me last time, Larry. Even the dogs wouldn't eat them wieners."

Larry's voice was pitched low and Shayne didn't get what he said. But he saw the woman nod, heard her as she told the boy, "Tommy, give the man a hand." She went back inside.

The boy followed the driver to the back of the truck. Larry opened

the double doors, pulled out a couple of wooden boxes, handed one to the boy. "Easy, kid. Them's Coney Island hot dogs you're carrying."

He hoisted the larger one onto his shoulder and went inside the store with the boy.

Shayne edged out of the shadows, eyed the name lettered on the cab door. *U-Kon Company. Meat and Meat Products.* The company was based in New York City.

A long way to come to sell hot dogs to an out-of-the-way general store in Florida.

The driver came out followed by the fat woman. "What are you beefing about?" He grinned. "You're getting those hot dogs and cold cuts dirt cheap."

Shayne edged back into the shadows as the driver swung up into the cab. He backed up, swung around, then headed down the dirt road toward Jack's place.

A truck out of New York . . . selling meat products to small stores in Florida? Or . . . selling something else?

Tim Rourke had heard there was a shipment of black market guns coming in tonight. Shayne wanted a look inside that truck.

"Remember," he told Jonathan. "Thirty minutes."

He swung around behind the store and jogged onto the dirt road heading toward the Bay. He could hear the U-Kon truck's engine growling up ahead, but

even at a slowed pace the truck was moving faster than Shayne.

The truck was already parked in front of Jack's place when Shayne paused on the edge of the parking area. Men in deckhand clothes were unloading the truck, hauling out long wooden boxes, carrying them into the bait and tackle shop. Shayne waited until the last of them had disappeared, then made a run for the back of the truck.

Several wooden boxes lay close at hand. Stenciled across the tops was the company name and under it, their contents: *Hams, Liverwurst, Pork.*

Shayne took out his knife to pry the lid off the nearest box. He didn't see the girl slip out of the cab, come up beside him until she said: "Hey, mister . . . what are you doing?" Her voice had a slurred piney-woods accent.

Shayne whirled. The girl edged back from him as she saw the knife. She was about fifteen, but looked older. She was barefoot, a dirty T-shirt over a pair of bra-less D cups.

Some hitchhiker Larry had picked up along the way, Shayne thought. *Helped pass the time on the road.*

He put his knife away, took out his wallet, flashed his license at her. "Police business," he said, keeping his voice down. "You're asking for one to six months on a work farm. Get out of here!"

She backed off another foot or two, then yelled, "Larry! Larry!"

Shayne clamped his palm over her mouth, began to swing her around. The round, cold nuzzle of a gun against his back stopped him.

"Figured you'd be back, Shayne," the voice behind the gun said. "But not tonight."

Shayne turned slowly. The man holding the gun was the man who had killed Jory Rojak — Matt Spinks.

Several men were coming up behind him. Nick the Greek was one of them. The driver, Larry, was with them.

Spinks snapped: "Come on, hurry! Get the rest of these cases unloaded!"

The girl had pulled away from Shayne, was standing beside Larry. Spinks held his gun cocked as he reached out, took Shayne's Magnum.

"Who is she, Shayne?"

Shayne looked at the driver. "Ask him."

Spinks eyed Larry. "You damn fool!" he snarled. "I've warned you about picking up underage tarts! You could get up to twenty years—"

The girl began to cry.

Spinks eyed her, his gaze showing little sympathy as he ran the risks through his mind.

"Take her inside," he told Larry. He swung around to the big redhead. "You, too, Shayne — move!"

Shayne began to turn toward the house. Then, for just a mo-

ment, he hesitated, surprise flashing through him. Jonathan had just appeared on the road behind them. Even as he spotted the kid, Jonathan ducked quickly back out of sight.

Spinks turned slowly, surveyed the night-shadowed road. "Thought I heard somebody," he muttered. He pointed to one of the men unloading the truck. "Caney, take a look around. Somebody else might have come nosing around with Shayne."

Caney nodded, drew his gun, headed up the road. Shayne watched him disappear into the night, feeling angry and helpless apprehension for Jonathan. *Damn it! He had told the kid to wait for him in the Buick!*

With Spinks holding a gun behind him, Shayne followed Larry and the frightened girl into the tackle shop. The boxes were being passed through the shop, out the back door to the fishing boats moored alongside the short pier. Shayne didn't have to look inside to know what was in them. Guns — hand grenades — mortars — small missile launchers! A lot of people on the other side of the Atlantic would pay big money for what was in those cases.

Shayne turned to Spinks. "Where's Cindy Day?"

Spinks pointed toward the lunchroom. "In there . . . with her mother." His lips pulled back in tight, nervous smile. "Might as well join them, Shayne."

Cindy was sitting at a table, her back to the wall, her mouth taped, her hands tied behind her back. Her eyes lighted up when she saw Shayne, then darkened as the others came in behind him.

Helen Wickham was beside her, mouth taped, hands tied, also. "Aunt" Milly was sitting across from them, a .22 caliber pistol in her hand.

She turned, stood up quickly, surprise in her face. She indicated the frightened hitchhiker. "Who's she?"

"Another passenger," Spinks answered. "We'll deep six her ten miles out along with the rest of them!"

Captain Jack, a marine cap over his white hair and a windbreaker over his spare shoulders, came in from the pier. "We're ready to shove off, Matt —"

He stiffened, surprise slackening his weathered features as he saw Shayne. His gaze flashed questioningly to Spinks.

"Found him nosing around the back of the truck," Spinks said. "He caught on quicker than I expected." Then, shrugging, a cold sneer on his lips, "I was hoping our little game would work and one of Joey's men would bump him off first."

Shayne eyed the gnarl-fisted skipper. "I knew about Spinks," he said grimly. "When did you and your wife sell out. Jack?"

Captain Jack's mouth went hard. "When he offered me a

chance to make a hundred times what I was making running this place," he said. "Milly and I aren't getting any younger. We were taking in nickels and dimes, and —"

"Cut it, Pop!" Spinks snapped. "You don't have to tell us your life story!" He motioned to Milly. "Untie them. We're going aboard."

The deep roar of a diesel engine outside caught them all by surprise. Larry turned toward the door, frowning. "My truck," he muttered.

Spinks snarled at him: "You got another one of these runaways stowed in there?"

The glare of headlights snapping on swept across the lunchroom windows as the truck began to back off. Gears clashed . . .

Larry yelled: "*Someone's stealing my truck!*" and made a dash for the door. Spinks started to follow, remembered - Shayne, swung around too late.

Shayne rammed into him like a linebacker, smashing his powerful right shoulder into Spinks' side. Spinks slammed against the wall, went down, dropping the gun.

Shayne lunged for it, got his hand on it just as Spinks reached for Shayne's Magnum, which he had stuck inside his belt.

Spinks kicked wildly at the big redhead, sent him stumbling back. He fired at Shayne, desperation in his face. The bullet missed Shayne by inches.

Shayne was on his knees when he shot back. The bullet drove Spinks against the wall. He slid slowly sideways, lay motionless.

Captain Jack sprang into life again. He kicked out at Shayne's gun hand, sending the gun flying, sliding under the table. Outside the roar of the truck was diminishing as it headed back toward the highway.

Shayne got to his feet as Jack, turning to Milly, snarled: "Shoot, Milly! Kill him!"

The woman stood frozen, gun in hand. Helen Wickham's eyes were glued on the older woman. She tried to speak, but only garbled sounds came from behind the tape.

Shayne took a step toward her.

Nick the Greek appeared in the lunchroom doorway. "What's holding you up, Matt—?"

He stiffened as he saw Spinks on the floor. Then Milly turned, fired a shot at him. It missed. He ducked back, ran toward one of the boats alongside the pier.

Captain Jack stared at his wife. "Why, Milly? A quarter of a million dollars! Our share. Why?"

She shook her head as she lowered the gun, let it drop to the floor.

"I couldn't, Jack. I just couldn't..."

In the distance now, police sirens sounded. Jack turned to the window as one of his boats began to back away from the pier.

"They're getting away," he said bitterly. "We could have gone with them, Milly."

Shayne picked up Milly's gun, shoved it into his pocket. "They won't get far," he said. "The Coast Guard has been notified. They've had a couple of cutters staked out there since nightfall."

The police sirens grew louder, swept to a stop just outside. Shayne and Milly were untying Cindy and Helen when Jonathan burst in, flanked by several patrol officers.

Jonathan's tight, brown face broke into a smile as he saw them.

"Cindy!"

He went to her, hugged her, then turned to Shayne. "Gee — hope you're not mad at me, Mr. Shayne. I saw you were in trouble, and I knew I couldn't get back to the Buick in time. So I took the truck."

Shayne shook his head. "I'm not mad, Jonathan . . . not mad at all!"

The afternoon paper lay on Lucy's desk, the headlines blaring *GUNRUNNING RING BROKEN. Coral Gables police, working with the Highway Patrol, smashed a black market gun dealers . . . It had Tim Rourke's byline.*

Lucy and Shayne were alone in the office.

"What are they going to do with Milly and Jack Hanson?" Lucy asked. "And that girl — that fifteen-year-old hitchiker?"

"The police sent her home," Shayne replied. "Name's Joann Smith." He shrugged. "But she probably won't stay home long."

"You'd think, after an experience like that, she'd be glad to stay put," Lucy said. Then: "What about the Hansons?"

"I think the law will go easy on them. They have strong allies in Danny and Helen Wickham." Shayne tugged thoughtfully at his left earlobe. "Helen found out about the gunrunning only a short while ago. Captain Jack convinced her that if she told her husband, he and Milly would be killed. And Spinks had her believing he was still working for Joey Cassell..."

"What about Cindy and Jonathan?" Lucy asked.

"The Wickhams have taken them under their wing. So they'll be with Cindy's mother after all."

The phone on Lucy's desk rang. Lucy picked it up, listened briefly, nodded, handed the receiver to Mike.

Gentry's voice boomed. "Thanks, Shayne."

The redhead grinned. "You get your medal?"

Gentry snorted. "You kidding? Doesn't work that way. I'm just glad it worked out."

Shayne hung up, turned to Lucy, looked her over.

"What happened to your hair?"

Lucy gave him a raised-eyebrow look.

"You changed it again."

She nodded. "You didn't like it before."

He scratched the tip of his nose. "You still have that new outfit? The pink one?"

She nodded, smiling. "You liked the outfit?"

"Yeah. Looks good on you when we take a vacation."

Lucy sank slowly down into her chair. "Where?"

"The Islands," Shayne replied. "Fun in the sun."

"Bermuda?"

"Been there. Hawaii, this time." Shayne smiled. "Pack your bikini."

There was a knock on the door. Lucy answered it. A United Parcel man handed her a small package. She signed it, handed it to Shayne. There was no return address on it.

Shayne tore the package open. He recognized the long manila envelope. There were ten thousand dollars in crisp hundred-dollar bills inside. Plus a note.

It read, *Your fee, Shayne.*

Thanks. It was signed. *Joey.* Lucy stared at the money. "What are you going to do with it, Michael?"

Shayne plucked at his left earlobe again. "What's your favorite charity, Lucy?" He tossed the envelope on the desk. "Come on. I'm taking you out to dinner."

Lucy slipped the envelope inside her desk drawer, locked it, and went out with Mike.

The Golden Lady

by EDWARD D. HOCH

She — and Her Fortune — Would be Mine, If I Could Foil a Foolproof Trap I Had Designed Myself!

I WAS BACK in Tangier for the first time since the post-war years a generation ago. It was part of Morocco now, no longer the internationalized zone it had been on my previous visit. And the city had changed along with the rest of the world. They manufactured textiles and transistors, just like Japan, and the people dressed for the most part just as they would in Madrid or Miami.

Of course the old Arab quarter of Medina was still there, with its bazaars and shops clustered around the Casbah castle, and on my first day back I went for a stroll through the familiar narrow streets with their high-windowed buildings. I even stood for a time watching the activity in the harbor, remembering how it had looked from my ship when the Navy docked here in '48.

My name is Tom Watkins, and I'm a 54-year old electronic technician in the employ of the British government. The job that brought me to this part of the world involved the installation of electronic controls on Gibraltar. It was an

elaborate system located in their rain water catchment area just east of the Rock itself, near the Caleta Palace Hotel where our crew was staying.

The pay was damn good for the five weeks it took to complete the installation. When it was over, and time to return to London, I got to thinking about Tangier. It's almost directly across the strait from Gibraltar, and there seemed no good reason why I shouldn't take the ferry over and look around for a few days before heading home. I suppose somewhere in the back of my mind I was remembering Zefa, and the times we had together back in '48.

So I took the ferry across the strait on a balmy December day only a few weeks before Christmas, thinking about the shoppers out scurrying through the damp chill back in London. If Tangier had changed greatly in those thirty-odd years since my last visit, there was still about the city an air of undeniable excitement, of black market and currency manipulation and big-time

drug smuggling. I walked down streets a thousand years old, and looked into eyes that would be forever evil.

I sought out the bar called *The Three Camels* on the outskirts of the Arab Quarter but it was gone, replaced incongruously by a children's playground for an adjoining apartment complex. Of course Zefa's flat down the street was gone too, but I went in search of her. It took me two days to find an old Arab bartender who remembered, and then another day to follow his vague directions to a downtown boutique where Zefa had worked briefly some years before. The woman who owned the shop gave me an odd sort of look, but finally she told me that Zefa was married and gave me her address.

I shouldn't have been surprised that Zefa, only a year or two younger than me, should have settled down in marriage. The dark-eyed young Arab girl from *The Three Camels* was a thing of the past now, existing only in my memories. But I still wanted to see her, and I hired one of the city's semi-official taxicabs to take me to her home.

I knew it was outside the city proper, and I imagined a middle-class suburb like those around London. I was totally unprepared for what I found — a great white mansion built along the lines of a Moorish castle, rising in the center of a lush oasis that stretched as far

as I could see. The native driver told me in broken English that it was the estate of Carlo Venetian, the international banker.

The name came back to me as I was walking up the paved driveway to the main house. Carlo Venetian was not just any international banker living in Tangier. He was the head of an overseas cartel rumored to be behind much of the recent price increase on the gold markets throughout the world.

And Zefa was his wife.

For some reason she was not too surprised to see me. Perhaps one of the people I'd questioned on my search had phoned to warn her. Whatever the reason, she met me at the door in a glowing gold housecoat, kissing me on the cheek as if I'd been out of her sight for a mere twenty-four hours instead of twenty-four years.

"Tom!" she said. "How good of you to come! It's been a long time!"

"It has, Zefa. Better than thirty years. I'm middle aged, complete with thinning hair and a bulging belly. But you look as lovely as ever." And she did. She was all curves and promises, with the same jet-black hair and and smoky skin I remembered. "You've married well, too."

She merely smiled at this, and led the way through a string of plush sitting rooms to a cozy sort of den furnished with huge pil-

lows. "Carlo has had some success," she replied finally, settling onto the rug with a pillow at her elbow.

"I can see that. He's a famous name in financial circles. Every time the price of gold takes another jump someone mentions Carlo Venetian."

I thought she blushed a bit at my words, and looked away, but she recovered herself quickly. "It has not all been good for me, Tom. My husband has been bedridden for years, living in an upstairs room where he sees only me. I am tied to him, and to this house."

"I'm sorry."

"But enough of me! You see my life all around you. Tell me about yourself, Tom. Did you marry?"

"I'm divorced," I told her. "Too recently to talk about."

"Now it's my turn to be sorry."

I was surprised how much her English had improved, how Western her mannerisms had become. I might have been sitting in a London suburb chatting with a neighbor's wife. I found myself telling her about my marriage after all, and about the job that had brought me here.

"Electronics must be fascinating," she said.

"Something like the Gibraltar job is. The rock is alive with apes, you know. We'd see them watching us work some days, looking down like wooden gods."

"But tell me more about the work itself," she urged. "My hus-

band has some interest in electronics now. Perhaps he would have a job for you."

"I'm only passing through," I told her. "There's nothing to keep me here."

"Money would keep you, wouldn't it? You have no ties back in England."

I had the sudden impression that the situation had changed, that she wanted me to stay in Tangier. Perhaps with a bedridden husband to care for, a friend from the past could help her through a few sleepless nights. "He's in electronics now?" I asked. "What happened to the gold business?"

She shrugged and settled back against the cushions. "People handle it for him. Swiss bankers. I suspect they pound it into sheets and smuggle it to the Far East, but that's none of my concern. The price of gold keeps going up, and our monthly check from Zurich keeps getting larger. That's all I care about. But with his illness Carlo needs something more to occupy his mind. This is why he has become interested in electronics."

"I appreciate the offer of a job — really, I do — but I'm only staying until tomorrow."

"Could I have someone contact you at your hotel?"

"I don't know. . ."

"Talk to him, at least. You won't be sorry."

I stayed a while longer, sipping palm wine and promising nothing,

and when I returned to my hotel I had every intention of leaving Tangier in the morning. I'd seen Zefa, in her great house with her bedridden husband and all the money in the world. Now, if I had any brains at all, it was time to go home.

THE MAN CAME to my hotel room the following morning, while I stood with a cigarette by the open window and watched the people hurrying to work. The man's name was Sicor, and he was a young thin-faced fellow of uncertain Mediterranean origins. He smiled as he spoke, but his eyes were veiled windows that revealed nothing. He might have been high on hashish, but I couldn't be certain.

"May I call you Tom?" he asked, sitting on the edge of my unmade bed. "Carlo Venetian has sent me to offer you employment."

"I discussed it briefly with Mrs. Venetian," I admitted. "But I doubt if I'll be able to remain in Tangier."

"Mrs. Venetian wants you to stay. And the pay will be very good."

"What would the job be?"

"Installing some electronic alarms at the Venetian home."

"You have no one else who could do that work?"

"She wants you. She doesn't trust local people."

"I don't know."

"The job would take only a few

weeks' time, and the pay would be five thousand British pounds."

The man knew how to find my weak spot, all right. That was more than I'd made on the whole Gibraltar job. I pondered only a few moments before agreeing.

I let him go, and sat in my room thinking about it for the rest of the morning. I wasn't at all certain, after all these years, that I wanted to get involved with Zefa or her husband's money. But I'd made the decision, and I'd see what developed from it.

In the days that followed I worked a great deal on the grounds of the Venetian mansion, directing the digging of holes for electronic sensors, installing alarms on the house itself, and even setting up a closed-circuit television system to scan the garage and pool areas. I saw Zefa again, daily. On the third night I took her out to dinner while Sicor remained at the house to care for Carlo Venetian.

That night, and the nights which quickly followed, might have been plucked from the past. We found a little bar that reminded us both of *The Three Camels*, and I danced with her to the somber beat of a native orchestra. And when we returned to the house on those nights, we made love among the pillows in the little den.

"What about your husband?" I asked her one time.

"If it were not for the money, I would wish him dead," she said quietly.

Once, when we returned home to find Sicor just coming down from upstairs, she pointed out his door. She said it was the largest room in the house, overlooking the vast reaches of the estate. Much of the decor was in gold, she told me, as it was in her own room.

I asked about the cartel that controlled the gold in the world money markets, but she could tell me little. Swiss bankers, she said again. Vague little men in Zurich who mailed monthly checks. Even Carlo had lost interest in the day-to-day dealings of his employees.

"If he were to die . . ." I said.

But she placed her finger to my lips. "There is no need for that. Not now."

As the days lengthened into weeks, I abandoned all thought of leaving Zefa. I could not leave her, now that I had found her again. I began to imagine that she had arranged the job for this very reason, so we might recapture the days of our youth. And I began to imagine something else as well — that she wanted me to kill her husband for her.

I found evidence of it in little things she said, even in her firm denial when I suggested her wanting his death. The idea grew with me, grew until I began to spend my days plotting how it could be done. There were few servants at the big house, other than the ubiquitous Sicor, and the deed would not be difficult to accomplish. For the old, bedridden man,

it might even be something of a blessing.

But there was one problem — the electronic alarm system I'd installed myself.

It would be easy for me to circumvent it, of course, but then suspicion would naturally fall on me. Much better if the crime were laid to a sneak thief, with the alarms functioning normally. If the man had disappeared by the time the police arrived, no one could say with certainty that he had never existed. Carlo Venetian would be dead and Zefa would be mine.

I began to ask her details of her husband's bedroom, until I'd pinpointed the exact location of the great canopied bed where he spent his days and nights. Then one day just before Christmas I purchased a Beretta 9mm automatic pistol at a sporting goods store in the city. I had it gift wrapped and left the store without exciting suspicion. I was ready.

Having tested out the alarm system on its first day, I knew the local police would take exactly six minutes to reach the house after the sensing device tripped the alarm. Six minutes would be more than enough for me.

I arrived at the house a little before midnight, when I knew the servants would be retired in the far wing. There was a light in the den, meaning Zefa was still up, but that didn't bother me. I avoided the alarms out by the driveway

and I was careful not to set any off until I reached the front door. Then I deliberately passed in front of a sensor as I forced open a window. I could hear the low hum of the house alarm as I quickly mounted the main staircase, taking the steps two at a time. As I reached the landing I hear her voice behind me.

"Tom!"

I didn't turn. Instead I pushed open the bedroom door and stood in the dimness facing the canopied bed where he waited. I didn't want to see him. I knew the look on his face might turn me from my purpose. This way, never seeing him, it was all impersonal, like soldiers in a war.

"Tom, you fool! Stop!"

I fired four shots at the bed, where his head and chest should have been.

"You damned fool!" She ran past the me into the room and turned on the lights.

The bed was empty.

"What . . . ? Where is he?" I asked, stunned.

Zefa faced me, breathing hard. The odor of cordite was heavy in the air. "He's dead, Tom. He's been dead for five years. I couldn't tell anyone because of the money, the gold. It reverts to the cartel after his death and the checks stop coming."

"I see."

"Now you've ruined it!" she grasped. "The shots will bring the servants, and the police will be al-

ready on their way. They will demand to see him. They will learn the truth."

"You still have the house, your money."

But Zefa shook her head. "They will say I defrauded them for five years. They will take it all away!"

I heard someone on the stairs, and saw that it was Sicor. "Zefa, Zefa," he shouted. "I warned you about him! Now they will have our heads!"

She seemed frantic, brushing back her hair and cocking her head for the first sound of the police siren. "I need to keep what I have," she told Sicor. "I need a body."

"What?"

"A body, fool!" She looked from Sicor to me. "The bed will burn. He was smoking, you see, and the bed will burn. It will fool these peasants here. Carlo Venetian will die, tonight!"

I never knew what she meant for sure, but I wasn't about to become a flaming corpse. I had the gun in my hand still, and four of its eight bullets remained. When Sicor dove for me, I shot him twice in the head. Then Zefa was in front of me, screaming. Five years had been a long time for her to live alone in that house, alone with the money and Sicor. I had brought something she needed, and now I gave it to her. The release, the only way out for us both.

I used the last two bullets on Zefa and then sat down to wait for the police.

Straight Falls

by R.G. HALLAWELL

“Little Linda” Vargo’s 230 Pounds of Muscular Femininity
Were No Match for Two Armed Thugs — So I Became a
Reluctant Referee . . .

I COULD HEAR him wheezing on the stairway — and my office door was closed. He sounded like a man who had just conquered Mount Everest while wearing concrete block shoes, and I wondered if I should phone for a respirator team. But he finally made it to the top of the stairs and on into my office. I waited while he sat in the chair and tried to recuperate.

He was short, fat and greasy-looking. His lips were so blue they looked wrong-side out, and he could have used a giantsized deodorant for each underarm. I got up and opened a window.

“You look for missin’ persons?” he asked between gasps. I nodded affirmatively and told myself that his wife had left town to buy a gas mask and never returned.

“For a hundred a day would you look for Little Linda?” he pleaded. “I gotta find her fast.”

Is the ace of spades black? I was two weeks behind in rent, alimony and groceries. For that kind of money I’d try and serve a subpoena on the Lock Ness monster, and I can’t even swim.

“Little Linda?” I asked.

“Yeah.”

I envisioned a dimple-cheeked darling lost in the woods and about to be parboiled by a wicked witch, until he showed me the photo.

Her name was “Little Linda” Vargo and at the bottom of the picture it read “six-four, two hundred thirty pounds.” She was in a menacing pose, arms outstretched, a leer on her face and dressed in a gym sweatsuit which failed to hide the ponderous breasts that meant Dolly Parton was now number two and would have to try harder.

“Are you Mr. Vargo?” I asked him.

“Naw. I’m Jake Gorski, rasslin’

promoter. This Vargo babe's got a sold-out match in Reno with the Purple Rhino. If she don't show then I'm out five grand. You gotta find her."

I wasn't a patron of the grunt-and-groan art, so I asked him if Ms. Vargo was any good as a wrestler.

"She can bench-press five hundred. She's a bonebreaker."

"Any idea where she might be?" I asked him.

"Probably holed up in some dump here in the city. She aint got any money, so don't bother check-in' the Ritz or Howard Johnson's. Here's three hundred bucks. If you find her in the next twenty-four hours there's a bonus."

I fondled the three bills and introduced them to my empty wallet while Gorski wheezed out of my office, after leaving a phone number where I could contact him. I looked at the photogenic Vargo chest again and decided that if no one had spotted this dame it was only because she was locked in a vault.

I took a cab to the sleazy part of town and began bar-hopping, but either there were too many drunks or women's wrestling was unpopular in the slums, because nobody recognized the photo. I flagged another cabbie and began soliciting the late-night greasy-spoon diners. My luck changed at an all-night hamburger joint when the fry-cook saw the photo and

suddenly became obsessed with wiping the counter. From the looks of the place it hadn't been done since Pershing chased Pancho Villa. I covered his wet bar-rag with a twenty and the atmosphere grew chummier.

"Go two blocks down and turn left on Mendora," he told me. "It's a three-story brick next door to the pool hall. Try the third floor."

Like Gorski said, she couldn't afford the Ritz, but it was a classic dump complete with cobwebs, empty bottles and a snoring wino sleeping one off on the third floor landing. I stepped over him and knuckle-rapped on the first door. When nobody answered I tried the second and third with similar results. I was about to try the opposite side when an arm from door number three grabbed my coat collar and threw me inside. It was a crude introduction but I was face-to-face with "Little Linda" Vargo. In fact, she was bending over me.

Her massive but well-formed frame was clad in a V-necked blouse and blue jeans. She was all broad and brawn, and I felt like a termite in a Redwood forest.

"You one of Jake's boys?" she asked me in a deep-throated voice, while I admired the giant-sized cleavage.

"Not exactly; I'm a private detective," I told her. But he did hire me to find you. Gorski claims

you ran out on him and if you don't show in Reno he'll drop a bundle. And I talk better when I'm not flat on my back," I added.

"She picked up my one seventy-five like a sack of feathers and deposited me in the nearest chair. When she leaned over I felt the distinct possibility of being breast-smothered to death. Normally I would have opted it as one of the better ways to depart, but not this time.

"I don't know what he told you, but Gorski is a loan shark who keeps his rasslers in debt up to their ears. He gets forty percent interest a week and his two buddies beat the hell outta whoever don't pay up."

Somehow I couldn't imagine Ms. Vargo being frightened of any two creatures on earth — and that included gorillas. But then she explained that Jo-Jo McCoy and Artie Talmadge were masters of brass knuckles and switchblades. So she had skipped when her two-hundred-dollar debt had interest-swelled to more than a thousand, and Gorski had sent McCoy and Talmadge bounty hunting.

"If I had the price of a bus ticket south I wouldn't be holed up in this crummy place, but a friend of mine let me stay here. He works at an eat-joint near here," she said.

Some friend. For twenty bucks or less Gorski's thugs would soon find her the same way I did.

"Pack your bag and don't ask questions," I told her. "We might

make it to the bus station if we're lucky." Now that I had found "Little Linda" I didn't know what the hell to do with her, but anyplace sounded better than where we were.

It was an idea whose time had come, but McCoy and Talmadge came first. Right through the unlocked door and in the middle of Linda's packing. They were hard-nosed and beefy; typical loan shark goon-squad material. I recognized McCoy from a newspaper photo when he was accused of breaking the legs of a dockworker who owed a few bucks on the ponies. Talmadge was shorter and thicker. Together they looked like the Steeler line.

"You the private dick that Jake hired?" McCoy asked. When I nodded he thumbed me toward the open door. "Take a walk, me and Artie gotta talk to this broad." Artie grinned evilly and fitted his right hand with a brass-knuckle glove.

I stepped around them and out the door. One of the goons kicked it shut. I pulled the .38 from the back of my belt, checked the cylinder-load and went back in fast.

Jo-Jo and Artie didn't appreciate dumping their assortment of brass and steel on the floor. The collection weighted my pockets after I'd gathered it and grinned at Vargo. I think she knew what was about to happen the way she filled that massive chest with an inhale.

"Don't worry about the furniture," I told her. "That guy at the all-night joint sold you out for twenty bucks, so have some fun. Call it a tag-team match. Vargo vs. McCoy and Talmadge for the El Cheapo belt." I laughed.

Vargo grinned for the first time since I'd met her. It wasn't bad although a couple of teeth were missing.

"Hey, wait a minute! This dame's a pro," Jo-Jo protested. "It ain't legal!"

Talmadge didn't get much of a chance. She headlocked him and rammed his skull into the wall. The plaster buckled, sifting to the floor, and Artie became unconsciously grayheaded. Jo-Jo tried to backpedal but my gun barrel ram-

med his spine until she threw him and went into a step-over-toehold. McCoy was still yelling when I quietly closed the door and waited in the hall. No sense in wakening the sleeping wino.

We caught a cab and rode to the bus station. I gave her one of Gorski's bills and she bought a one-way ticket to Waycross, Georgia.

"I'll pay it back when I start drivin' a bulldozer again," she promised.

"What for?" I laughed. "Hell, I had a ringside seat that was worth that much!"

But it was embarrassing when she picked me up and kissed me just before the bus pulled out.

COMING NEXT ISSUE:

LADY FROM THE GRAVE

A New Mike Shayne Short Novel by BRETT HALLIDAY

PLUS TWO NOVELETS:

ADVERSARIES by JERRY JACOBSON

BLACK AS THE NIGHT by JOE R. LANSDALE

and LEWIS SHINER

The Tattered Corpse

by W.L. FIELDHOUSE

It Was One of the Most Vicious Murders Major Lansing Had Ever Encountered. But He Knew that If He Could Find the Motive, He'd Find the Killer!

ONE OF THE MP's had thrown up when he saw the body. Major Clifford Lansing didn't blame him. Formerly a Detroit police detective and an Airborne Ranger in Vietnam, currently a homicide investigator for the CID, Lansing had seen many corpses. None could equal the sheer horror of this mutilated pile of human flesh. As Lansing emerged from the storage room that had been transformed into a torture chamber, the stench of death followed him.

"Man, even the Viet Cong never done anything like that!" a Black MP sergeant named Throne remarked.

"It's pretty bad," Lansing agreed, closing the door. "Who found it?"

"A retired Army vet named Driscoll," the military policeman replied. "He married a German National and decided to stay here. He's still an American citizen, of course. Driscoll lives on his pension and a small salary the Army pays him to manage the

NCO club."

"Let's go see him," Lansing said as they walked through the basement corridor to a stairwell.

They mounted the stairs and entered the NCO club itself. The place was still closed. Chairs were stacked on tables and the room was dark and quiet. A silver-haired citizen with a deeply lined face sat on a bar stool with a glass and a bottle of whiskey.

"Mister Driscoll?" Lansing said.

"You're from the Criminal Investigation Department?" the older man asked. He automatically scanned the numerous ribbons the major wore on the tunic jacket of his Class-A dress uniform. *Damn!* Driscoll thought.

Lansing nodded. "I'd be grateful if you'd explain how you found the body," he said, removing his gold-trimmed service cap, revealing short brown hair with increasing gray surrounding the temples.

"Well, I came in this morning to get the club ready to open for

business at noon. I don't generally go into the basement, but today I found some water had leaked from under the sink in the kitchen, so I went down to get a mop. That's when I smelled it." He tilted the glass to his lips and drained the contents.

"Is the storage room always unlocked?"

"Yes," Driscoll said, pouring himself another drink. "Never had any reason to lock it until now."

"Any idea who the victim was?"

"There ain't much of a face left, sir."

"I noticed," Lansing replied dryly. "But the corpse was obviously a somewhat overweight male Caucasian with white hair. He's wearing a European suit, good quality. Does that give you any clue as to his identity?"

"Seems to me there was an old German National who used to come in here with a young non-com."

"Do you remember anything about this NCO? Name, rank, description?"

"Only seen him in uniform once. Don't remember his rank. He's tall, almost as tall as you, Major. He's real skinny, blond hair, and I think he wears glasses."

"Was the club open last night?"

"No, sir," Driscoll said. "I don't hold with working on Sunday

unless it's necessary. You figure the killing happened last night?"

"It could have happened any time between Saturday night after you closed the club to pre-dawn this morning. Anyone could have entered the foyer and gotten into the basement unobserved," Lansing mused, more to himself than to the others. "If the corpse is a German, he should have left his passport with the security police at the front gate, and a serviceman should have signed a form accepting responsibility for the German's conduct while on a U.S. Army base. If these regulations were upheld, assuming the National didn't sneak into Dyer Barracks and wasn't smuggled in against his will, that passport and the name of the GI who escorted the man to the NCO club should still be at the SP at the entrance."

"I'll go down there and check it out if you like, sir," Throne offered.

"Thank you, Sergeant," Lansing replied. "I'll go. I'd rather you stayed here and kept everybody out of the basement until our lab crew arrives. I'd better warn them that this one is messy. Very messy."

A DOZEN MEN, dressed in fatigue trousers and tennis shoes with either T-shirts or bare chests, darted around the gymnasium, trying to gain control of an elusive basketball. Lansing watched them

dribble, shoot at baskets and deflect each other's moves. He waited until the game was finished before calling out across the court.

"Spec Six Baker?"

Heads turned to a tall, thin figure with wavy blond hair. The man shrugged to his comrades, then dutifully jogged over to the major.

"They told me at the dispensary you spend your lunch hour here," Lansing said. He introduced himself.

"CID?" Baker's eyes widened. "I didn't know I was in *that* much trouble."

"Then you realize you're in trouble?" Lansing inquired as they strolled toward the locker room.

"You want to see me about old Hans Schmit pulling his disappearing act Saturday night, right?"

"No. I want to see you about his murder," Lansing replied flatly.

"*Murder!*" Baker exclaimed, frozen with amazement as the other players passed him on their way to the locker room.

"Someone took him to the storage room of the NCO club. He was tortured and murdered. His passport is still at the SP shack and your name is signed as his escort."

"I know," Baker said. "That is, I know about his passport and that I signed for him, but I don't know where he got to later. We

went to the NCO club, had a few drinks, shot the bull for a while." Baker shrugged. "Frankly, I got pretty tight and decided to leave with some buddies I met there. We . . . well, I guess I'd better level with you. We went to *The Wall*."

"The one in Berlin is pretty far away," Lansing said, "So I assume you mean that celebrated brothel in Nuremberg, *die Wand*?"

"Yes, sir. I know it's off limits but . . . well, you know how it is."

"And you left Schmit at the club."

"Hell, I figured he'd just leave, pick up his passport and head for home. He had before."

"Did he talk to anyone in the club?"

"Yeah," Baker snapped his fingers. "Hans and Marty got into quite a discussion. They went off somewhere to talk in private."

"Who is Marty?"

"He's the bartender. I don't know why the Army hires civilians for jobs like that. A lot of GI's could use some extra money, but only a few are able to earn anything besides their monthly salary."

"Was this conversation friendly?"

"Not really. At least it didn't seem to be. Marty is a kraut and they were speaking German. They seemed to know each other, but Hans didn't seem to happy to see Hans."

"Were they still talking when you left?"

"As far as I can remember." Baker snapped his fingers. "Hey, this might be important! A guy named Redlance was acting real snotty toward Hans. Of course, Redlance always acts that way after he's had a few drinks and sees a German within yelling range. He sort of threatened Hans."

"Threatened?"

"Yes, sir. He said he'd like to cut Hans's goddamn guts out and tie them to a stake, something like that. He said his ancestors would have known how to take care of a lousy Nazi. I tried to tell him Hans was a civilian doctor during the war, but that crazy Indian just kept ranting and raving. Finally, the sergeant at arms threw him out of the club."

"May I have the names of your friends? The fellows who went to Nuremberg with you when your hormones became active."

Baker gave him the names, ranks and units of three friends. Lansing jotted down the information.

"One more question," Lansing said. "Why did you spend so much time with Herr Schmit? After all, he was of a different nationality and quite a few years older than you. You must have had something in common."

"We did," Baker answered. "He was a doctor and I'm a medic.

Victims of the RAF bombings of German cities were his patients. I was in Vietnam. We were both healers of bodies shattered by war."

"I see." Lansing nodded. "Thanks for your time, Specialist."

GENERAL CLAYTON was a heavy-set, bull-like man with a severe crew cut that made his head appear almost flat. Lansing stood at attention in the general's office, reported briskly and saluted. Clayton returned the gesture. As Lansing lowered his arm, he noticed a long-faced man clad in a dark blue *Polizei* uniform standing to his right.

"Major Lansing, this is *Kapitan* Beidler of the Furth Police Department. As a German citizen was killed, the local law enforcement is naturally concerned," Gen. Clayton said. "Captain, this is Major Clifford Lansing, the best homicide investigator in the USAEUR."

"USAEUR?" the German cop asked. His English was splendid, but his tone was puzzled.

"United States Army in Europe," Clayton explained. "Sorry. We're rather accustomed to military abbreviations."

Beidler nodded. Lansing offer his hand, and the *Polizist* shook it.

"Please be seated," Clayton invited. They sank into two arm-chairs in front of the general's

desk. "Very well, Major. What have you got?"

"The autopsy confirms that Herr Schmit was murdered approximately zero three hundred hours, Sunday morning, sir," Lansing said. "He was strapped to a chair and tortured, the tissue damage suggests, for over an hour. Pliers, lit cigarettes, a sharp instrument (perhaps a knife, razor or even a scalpel) were used. Death, however, was caused by two twenty-five-caliber bullets fired into the medulla oblongata. Powder burns indicate the gun muzzle was pressed against the back of Schmit's head. No finger or footprints were discovered."

"Any primary suspects?"

"Two, possibly three," Lansing replied.

"The German authorities have been kind enough to check Schmit's passport with the Reiseab Agentour," Clayton said. "*Kapitan?*"

Turning to Lansing, Beidler said, "No passport with the number of the one you found at Dyer Barracks was ever issued to anyone named Schmit."

"It's a forgery?" Lansing asked, wrinkling his brow.

The German nodded. "We're sending a copy of the dead man's prints to Bonn. Hopefully we'll have some positive identification by the end of the week."

"Any idea concerning a possible motive, Major?" Clayton inquired.

"Not yet," Lansing confessed. "But since torture was used I'm inclined to believe someone either hated Schmit or wanted to extract information from him." Turning to Beidler, Lansing asked, "Have your people found where Schmit lived yet?"

"Yes. Fortunately, the deceased — whoever he was — rented an apartment in Furth using the name Hans Schmit. I have the address."

"Have you inspected it yet?"

"No." Beidler smiled. "I'll give you first shot at it if you want. Please share any information you discover with my department."

"Thanks, Captain." Lansing nodded. "I'll keep in touch." To General Clayton, he said, "I'll need to get some two-o-ones from Ansbach, sir."

"Two-o-ones?" Beidler inquired.

"Personnel files," Clayton explained. "A two-o-one file is a record of a soldier's military history and also contains considerable information about his civilian life before enlisting." The general looked down at his desk as an expression similar to embarrassment altered his features. "Oh, Major? I feel I should tell you that my brother, Congressman Clayton, is here with a delegation concerning U.S.-German relations."

Lansing blinked with surprise, wondering what this had to do with him.

"He brought his son. As he's attending a summit conference in Bonn and I'm a bit pressed at the moment, I'll need some help looking after my nephew."

Lansing's eyes widened. "What does that mean, sir?"

SPECIALIST FIFTH CLASS
Wendy Davis, an attractive WAC in her mid-twenties, was rarely angry. As Major Lansing's personal secretary, she didn't have many reasons to be upset. However, a freckle-faced, ten-year-old reason had arrived. She was gathering up the records Gary Clayton had pulled from a filing cabinet and scattered all over the floor when Lansing entered the office.

"Good afternoon, Wendy," he said.

"Don't count on it, sir," she replied, her eyes flashing.

"Oh?" Lansing glanced at the boy. He was folding a page he'd torn from a USAEUR regulation booklet. "The general's nephew?"

"Yes, sir," Wendy said, rising to put the files away.

"So you're Gary?" Lansing said, unable to think of anything more original to say to a child.

"Who the hell else would I be?" the kid snorted.

"Nice," Lansing muttered as he moved to his desk, glancing at the *in* box to see if any messages or reports had arrived. None had, but he noticed a wad of

chewing gum stuck to the blotter. "Gary, my desk isn't a trash can. Get your gum off it, okay?"

"Do it yourself," Gary replied with a sneer.

Lansing considered saying something, rejected the notion, and turned to Wendy. "Would you be willing to make a trip to Ansbach? I need some two-o-ones."

"Oh! Of course, sir!" Wendy nodded, clearly eager to get away from the brat.

"Good," Lansing said, producing a list of names of individuals he wanted information about. A paper airplane sailed in front of his face. "When did the general say he'd get the boy?"

"He didn't," Wendy replied as she hurried out the door before Lansing could decide to go to Ansbach himself, leaving her to babysit.

"Great," Lansing growled as Wendy closed the door behind her.

Gary had improvised a slingshot from a rubber band and a Y formed with his thumb and forefinger. He fired a paper clip into the nameplate on Lansing's desk. Before Lansing could scold the boy, the door opened. Major Conglose, a short, balding man with a face that suggested his entire diet consisted of sucking lemons, entered. He squinted as he looked up at Lansing; his vanity caused him to reject the glasses he so sorely needed.

"General Clayton said I'd find

his nephew here," Conglose announced, a snide smile playing at his sour mouth. He obviously believed the general had chosen him over Lansing to care for Gary. Conglose was always delighted to acquire any degree of one-up-manship over his fellow officers, especially Clifford Lansing.

"He's all yours," Lansing assured him eagerly, darting through the doorway.

"Lansing?" Conglose asking, turning toward the door. "How long will —"

Suddenly, Conglose jumped with pain. A surprised yelp escaped from his mouth. Gary had fired another paper clip at a new target: Major Conglose's backside.

"Good-bye, sir," Lansing said quickly as he walked briskly down the corridor. *Well, the boy's not all bad*, he thought.

PARKING HIS WHITE Volkswagen in front of the tenement building in Furth, Lansing emerged from the car. He smiled as he felt a warm breeze. Spring in Bavaria was always pleasant. Following a very harsh winter, the new season was even more welcome this year. Walking to the building, he entered a small lobby. A square-faced German stared at Lansing's uniform with mild surprise.

"*Wo ist der Hausherr, bitte?*" Lansing asked.

"You have found the landlord," the man behind the desk replied, also speaking German. "What may I do for you?"

"I'm with the Army Criminal Investigation Department. I'm here concerning the death of one of your boarders."

"Death?"

"Morden," Lansing replied flatly.

The word *murder* has an unsettling effect in any language. The landlord shivered. Lansing asked if he could inspect Herr Schmit's room. The landlord agreed. Leading the major upstairs, he used a passkey to unlock Schmit's room. The landlord gasped as the door swung open and he stared inside.

Furniture had been overturned, upholstery ripped apart. Dresser drawers had been pulled out, the contents dumped onto the floor. The mattress had been removed from the bed and slit open, feathers strewn everywhere.

"*Gut Gott!*" the landlord exclaimed. "What happened?"

"I'd say somebody made a lot of work for the maid," Lansing said.

Lansing searched the wreckage of the room. He wasn't surprised to find nothing to suggest why Schmit had been murdered or why the room had been ransacked. Whatever evidence may have been there had been removed.

The major emerged from the boarding house with more ques-

tions than answers. As he walked to the Volkswagen, a small, thin man dressed in an oversized raincoat approached him. Before Lansing could reach the car door, the man produced a small, blue-black Walther PPK automatic.

"You will come with me," the man said in broken English.

"*Was ist los?*" Lansing asked, keeping his hands in clear view.

"Arms at your sides," the man ordered, slipping his pistol into his pocket, holding it out of sight. "Walk to the car at end of the street."

Lansing obliged. He noticed the man was unusually dark for a Central European. Although the man's English contained a thick guttural accent, Lansing didn't think he was a German. This wasn't uncommon as there are as many *Auslanders* (foreigners) as *Deutschlanders* in the Federal Republic of Germany.

Moving to the yellow Datsun at the curb, Lansing noticed another man sitting in the back seat. Like the gunman, his complexion was very dark. Although he was sitting, the man appeared to be tall and heavily built with powerful muscles. His face was broad, with a wide mouth and hard, dark eyes. The armed escort told Lansing to get into the car. Lansing obeyed. The man with the Walther slid behind the wheel.

Without warning, the man in the back seat struck Lansing in the back of the head with a lead-

filled sap. A scarlet light flashed inside his skull as he slumped forward. The blow hadn't knocked him unconscious; he could still hear his abductors although he was stunned and steady throbbing pain dulled his senses.

"*Lo, Yuri! Lo!*" the gun-toting man urged.

"*Schakit, Ezra!*" the man in the back seat snapped as he twisted Lansing's arms behind his back and handcuffed his wrists together.

Yuri grappled Lansing's hair, pulled his head back, and tied a cloth around his eyes. The major heard Yuri chuckle as he applied the blindfold. Ezra muttered something, speaking a language unfamiliar to Lansing. The Datsun's engine growled to life.

THE JOURNEY seemed to last for hours. Unable to see or move his hands, Lansing felt cold hard fear balling up in his stomach. He wondered who these men were and why they'd kidnapped him. He was relieved and frightened at the same time as he felt the car come to a halt.

Ezra and Yuri pulled him out of the Datsun. Lansing could feel the hardness of pavement under his feet as they marched him forward. Hinges creaked, and Lansing was shoved through a doorway. A conversation erupted between the two abductors and another man. Finally, the blindfold was removed.

Lansing was inside a warehouse. High piles of wooden crates concealed a greater portion of three walls. A small metal desk with a single straight-backed chair in front of it, faced the CID investigator. Behind the desk was a black-haired man with a smooth oval face and a pencil-thin moustache, dressed in a black turtle-neck shirt. He was polishing a Uzi machine pistol with a cloth. Ezra stood nearby, his hand still in his pocket. Yuri unfastened the handcuffs.

"I apologize for any discomfort my men may have caused you, Major," the man behind the desk said, placing his weapon on the desktop. "Please be seated."

"Do I have a choice?" Lansing asked, gingerly touching the lump at the back of his head.

"Let's be civil about this, Major. I realize Yuri was needlessly rough with you. He's young and a bit overzealous."

Lansing lowered himself into the chair.

"You must be wondering who we are and why we brought you here."

"I can guess," Lansing replied dryly, "You've got a Uzi on your desk and your buddies call each other Ezra and Yuri. What's your name? Menachem?"

"You are surprisingly close." The man behind the desk smiled thinly. "I am Captain Moshe Zavarj, Israeli Intelligence."

"*Mossad?*"

Zavarj nodded. "We want to know why the United States Army is interested in Hans Schmit."

Lansing briefly explained his homicide investigation. "And why is *Mossad* concerned?"

"Just because we have current problems with the PLO, don't think we've forgotten our old enemies."

"Schmit was a war criminal?" Lansing asked, wondering why he hadn't suspected it sooner.

"His real name was Heinrich Shroder. He was the physician at a prisoner of war camp in France during the Second World War."

"POW? Not a concentration camp? What's *Mossad* want him for?"

"We have our reasons," Zavarj stated flatly. "As you didn't even know Shroder's true identity, you obviously have nothing of value to tell us. You may go."

"Did your people kill him?" Lansing asked as he rose.

"If we *had* killed him, why would we want to see you?"

"Maybe you didn't find what you wanted in his room."

"I admit we were watching his room to see who might show up. We have picked the lock and poked around a bit, but that doesn't mean we were looking for anything special."

"You were told to leave!" Yuri growled, advancing with the handcuffs ready.

"No need for that," Zavarj

told him. "We are, after all, allies. I'll have Ezra drive you back to the boarding house."

"No. thanks," Lansing said. "I'll take a cab."

"Whatever pleases you, Major," the Israeli team leader replied.

"I'm glad you said that," Lansing said as he turned toward the door.

A karate *kiya* shout startled the three Israelis. Lansing's right leg whipped around in a *Taekwondo* wheel kick, the back of his heel slamming into Yuri's lower abdomen. The big Israeli doubled up with a groan, bile rising into his throat. Lansing stepped closer and hit Yuri behind the ear with the side of his hand. Yuri collapsed to the floor in an unconscious heap.

Lansing glanced at the two remaining Israelis. Ezra had drawn his PPK and Zavarj held the Uzi, one hand poised near the bolt. The American bowed slightly.

"That was a real pleasure," Lansing muttered. "*Shalom.*"

He walked to the exit and departed.

LANSGING TRIED to concentrate on the 201 files as Major Conglose paced around the office, his high-pitched voice squealing with rage. Lansing wondered how such a small man could make so much noise when he walked.

"Are you trying to start an

international incident? Beating up an Israeli agent, for chrissake!" Conglose yelled.

"He didn't have any reason to slug me," Lansing said calmly, leafing through the records. "Maybe he won't be so apt to hit people in the future." Lansing leaned back in his chair behind the desk. "Besides, the *Mossad* boys kidnapped me. They don't want an international incident either. They won't report to Tel Aviv that I roughed up one of their more heavy-handed agents."

"You say they neither admitted nor denied that they killed Schmit?" Conglose asked.

"Not really," Lansing shrugged. "Of course, they wouldn't confess to torturing and executing a German National on a U.S. military installation even if they did it. On the other side of the coin, the Israelis have a reputation for hunting down Nazis and bringing them to justice. They don't want that reputation diminished, either. So they choose to be coy."

"How could they have gotten into Dyer Barracks?"

"The *Mossad* is very efficient. They could probably break into Fort Knox if they wanted in badly enough," Lansing told him. "Which raises the question: why did they want Schmit/Shroder? According to the files I received concerning former German officers between 1933 to 1945, Heinrich Shroder was a captain, M.D., in the army. He wasn't in

the Gestapo and he was never associated with any concentration camps. Nonetheless, *Mossad*, whether they killed Schmit or not, is definitely interested in him for some reason."

"What about the other suspects?" Conglose snapped.

"Major, I hope you get the position of executive officer after Colonel Harris is transferred," Lansing said, bristling with irritation. "Perhaps then you'll quit poking your nose into my investigations."

"I'm still *senior* field grade, Lansing."

"So you keep reminding me," Lansing muttered. "Okay, Schmit's (or Shroder's) old pal, Specialist Sixth Class Harrimon Baker, is a medic at Dyer Barracks dispensary. The son of a successful New York jeweler, Baker joined the army in 1979. He served two years in Vietnam and was awarded the Medal of Merit and the Bronze Star. He got out in 1972, but re-enlisted the same year. Although he's assigned to Charlie Battery, he lives in a small apartment off base. He's been in Germany two years."

"What about this Indian character?"

"Private First Class John Redlance is a full-blooded Sioux from South Dakota. His father was a hero in World War Two; awarded the Silver Star and the Purple Heart. Redlance joined the Army about a year and a half ago. His record was flawless until

he was stationed in Germany. Since being assigned to Bravo Battery at Dyer, Redlance has received two Article Fifteens, both for misconduct involving locals. In other words, he likes to beat up Germans. His MOS mechanic."

"Are you going to question them tonight?" Conglose asked, glancing at his wristwatch. "It's nineteen twenty hours. They'll probably be off duty. You might have a hard time finding them."

"But Martin Dietrich, the bartender at the Dyer Barracks NCO club, should be available," Lansing said, rising from behind his desk. He grinned slightly as he asked, "How was your day with the general's nephew?"

"I should get combat pay," Conglose muttered. "Tomorrow morning I'm supposed to take the little snout to the Nuremburg zoo."

"I hope they have a cage strong enough to hold him," Lansing commented as he headed for the door.

FEELING AS AWKWARD clad in civilian slacks and sports shirt as he would in a suit of armor, Lansing entered the NCO club. If he'd worn an officer's uniform into a non-com tavern he would have attracted more attention than a two-headed cyclops. U.S. military bases in Europe are much smaller than their counterparts in the states. For this reason, most NCO clubs are also small, the majority used by enlisted men as well.

Dyer Barracks was no exception. Lansing guessed that most of the patrons clustered around tables or seated at the bar were not above the rank of E-four.

A large heavy-set man with gray hair and well-groomed beard tended bar. He joked with the servicemen as he prepared their drinks, revealing a ready smile. Lansing approached the bar.

"What can I get you? *Lowenbrau*, *Tucker*, 'American soda pop' or booze?" the barkeeper asked, grinning. "American soda pop" is a term often used by Deutschlanders to describe brands of beer from the United States, which usually have a much smaller alcohol content than German brews.

Lansing introduced himself. "I want to talk to you about the late Herr Schmit."

"Okay," Dietrich replied, using American slang with the ease of a man who associated with GI's three nights a week. "But I hardly knew the guy."

"Maybe you knew *Herr Doktor Shroder*, *Kapitan*, *Deutsch Armee*, better."

Marty Dietrich's face fell. He looked down at the floor as if an answer was lying at his feet. Raising his head, he whistled to attract the attention of a young Turk working as a waiter. "Ahmed? Take over for me for a few minutes," he said.

The Turk moved behind the bar as Dietrich joined Lansing. He

led the CID investigator to a side exit and outside onto a paved sidewalk. The cool night air reminded them that winter had only recently ended. Marty produced a pack of cigarettes as he said, "All right, Major. I knew Shroder."

"He recognized you the other night?"

Dietrich nodded as he lit a cigarette. "I was a sergeant during the war. For a while, I was a guard at the same POW camp with Shroder. Talk about a lousy job!" He shook his head. "Anyhow, he asked me not to call him by his real name. He said if I kept my mouth shut about him he'd do me a big favor. Shroder said he had something of great value. We came out here to discuss it in private, but all he said was he had something that would be priceless anywhere in the world. He wanted to know if I'd be interested in a piece of the action."

"What did you tell him?"

"I said it sounded crooked and I didn't want anything to do with it."

"Why was he using a false name?"

"I don't know. The other night was the first time I'd seen him since nineteen forty-four."

"Could the Israelis have any reason to be after him?"

"Not that I know of." Dietrich thought for a moment. "Well, Shroder was a National Socialist. He was a half-ass member, but

a Nazi nonetheless. Maybe the Israelis figured that was reason enough."

"What do you know about Baker?"

"Who the hell is Baker?"

"Okay. How about Redland?"

"Geez!" Dietrich rolled his eyes. "Do I ever know that Indian! He hates Germans so much he won't even buy a drink when I'm tending bar."

"Do you think he could have killed Shroder?"

"I wouldn't be surprised," Dietrich replied flatly. "One night he was pretty liquored up and he started ranting and raving about how he'd like to get his hands on a Nazi. Said he'd like to skin them alive and castrate them."

"Where'd Shroder go after talking with you?"

"Beats me, Major." Dietrich shrugged. "He just seemed to vanish into thin air."

"Maybe," Lansing muttered, "but he materialized in the basement."

SP6 BAKER'S appearance differed greatly compared to the first time Lansing met him. Dressed in a white smock and horn-rimmed glasses, Baker resembled a senior intern more than a soldier. The medic frowned slightly when he saw Lansing sitting in a dispensary waiting room.

"Good morning, Major," he said. "I hope you aren't ill."

"I'm a little sick of people being

evasive with me," the CID investigator replied, leaning back in the well-used vinyl couch with a weary sigh.

"What seems to be wrong, sir?" Baker asked, lowering himself onto the couch beside Lansing.

"I talked to your three chums. The fellows who joined you on your lustful journey to Nuremburg the other night. At first, they were reluctant to supply any information, but they finally told me what happened. You all selected the ladies of the evening that you fancied and entered the brothel, each going into a separate room. However, each man tells me, when they emerged, you were nowhere in sight. They waited outside for half an hour before deciding you must have already left."

"I was feeling my oats that night," Baker grinned. "I bought a second round."

"You had a lot of stamina considering how drunk you claimed to be."

"Look, I came out of the cat-house, couldn't find my buddies, so I hailed a cab and returned to the base."

"Any witnesses?"

"Of course not."

"Herr Schmit hadn't practiced medicine for years. He lived in a rundown boarding house. He was working as a clerk in a drugstore in Furth. How'd you find out he was once a doctor?"

"I met him in a tavern in Zirndorf one night. We got to talking and I mentioned that my Military Occupational Specialty is medic. He told me he used to be a doctor. From his knowledge, I believed him," Baker answered, frowning slightly. "I don't know why anyone would want to kill him. He was a nice old guy."

"He used to work at a *nice* POW camp in France," Lansing said dryly. "Did you know that?"

"No." Baker's mouth fell open. "Hey! I bet Redlance did it! His old man was a war hero. The Nazis did a real number on him, left him crippled for life. If anybody would want to torture Schmit and put a couple bullets in his brain, Redlance would be the one."

LANSGING FOUND PFC John Redlance in the motor pool. He was standing on the running board of a deuce and a half truck with the hood raised as he installed new spark plugs. Redlance wasn't tall, but he was muscular and ruggedly handsome with high cheekbones, a hawkbill nose and a firm mouthline. Lansing called his name. Redlance glanced down, saw the golden oak leaves on the epaulets of Lansing's field jacket, and hopped off the vehicle. He came to attention and saluted smartly.

"Yes, sir," he said. His manner would have done justice to a West Point cadet.

Returning the salute, Lansing said, "At ease. I'd like to talk to you about Hans Schmit."

"I heard about it, sir." Redlance nodded, extracting a rag from a pocket of his coveralls to wipe his grimy hands.

"Schmit was killed a few hours after you reportedly made a remark that you'd like to cut his guts out. Correct?"

"Something like that, yes, sir."

"Why?"

"I don't like Nazis, sir."

"Why did you think Schmit was a Nazi?"

"I heard him call that kraut bartender *Feldweibel*. That means 'sergeant.' Old comrades in arms." His dark eyes flashed with anger.

"You understand German?"

"A little."

"After you were told to leave the NCO club, what did you do?"

"I was upset," Redlance said. "I always walk when I'm upset."

"Alone?"

"I'm pretty poor company when I'm angry, sir."

"Can anyone vouch for your activities after the incident in the club?"

"I didn't kill that old sausage-eating bastard, sir," Redlance said flatly. "But when you catch whoever did it, I'd like to know his name. The only decoration I have is the National Defense Medal, but I'll gladly give it to him."

"I don't know much about

Sioux customs," Lansing began, "But I seem to recall that anger and hate are considered destructive emotions. Aren't you dwelling on those feelings a hell of a lot?"

"My father was in the Army Air Corps during World War Two. He was shot down and taken prisoner. Those German monsters tortured him for days to wring all the information they could out of him." Redlance's jaw muscles tightened with bitter fury. "He was on crutches until the day he died."

"I'm sorry," Lansing said solemnly, "but every single German citizen isn't responsible for what happened to your father."

Redlance looked down at his feet for a moment. "I didn't kill him. I don't have any alibi to back me up, but I didn't kill him."

"I'll keep in touch," Lansing said as he prepared to leave. "By the way, do you recall where your father was held prisoner?"

"Southern France, sir," Redlance replied.

A SCRAMBLED assortment of statements, 201 files, German military and passport records and personal notes covered Lansing's desk. He stared down at them silently until SP5 Davis offered him a cup of coffee.

"What?" he said with a start as if disturbed from a mild trance. "Oh, yes. Thank you," he said, accepting the cup. "I have an

eerie feeling that the answer to this case is right in front of me," he went on, glancing down at his desk.

"Any way I can help?" Wendy asked.

"Maybe," Lansing replied, sipping his coffee. "Dietrich claimed Schmit said he had something of value, something that would be priceless anywhere in the world. The Israelis want Schmit, or possibly something Schmit had. But what?"

"Didn't the Nazis steal a fortune in art objects during the war?"

"Yes." Lansing nodded. "But famous treasures would be difficult to transport, even harder to sell, and hiding them in a tiny apartment like Schmit was living in would be pretty close to impossible."

"What about drugs, sir? A kilo of heroin is worth half a million dollars on the street."

"Possible," Lansing answered, "but if Schmit literally meant *anywhere* in the world, drugs wouldn't fill the bill. Trying to sell them in certain countries, Islamic nations or a dictatorship, for example, would be far too dangerous to be practical." Lansing raised his hands in mild despair. "If Baker killed him, why would Schmit trust an American medic or want to cut him in on some sort of deal? If Redlance killed him, anything Schmit might have had wouldn't have any connection with

his murder. Of course, if Dietrich killed him, he could have made the whole story up just to throw us off the track."

"What about the Israelis?"

"They may have wanted something Schmit had. Maybe he joined some kind of Nazi underground movement after the war? His medical career seemed to have gone to hell after the Third Reich fell."

"A list of war criminals could be worth a lot to the right people," Wendy commented.

"Wait a minute!" Lansing said, gathering up some notes in one hand and a file folder in the other. "This could be . . ." His eyes seemed to glow as he declared, "*This is it!*"

"What, sir?" Wendy asked eagerly.

"I'll explain on our way upstairs. I have to see Sergeant Doyle," he said, rising from behind his desk.

"You'll be borrowing his lock picks again?"

Lansing nodded as he moved toward the door. "I'm also going to draw a forty-five from the arms room before I leave. Any one who can torture and execute a helpless old man is fully capable of killing anyone who tries to apprehend him."

MAJOR CLIFFORD LANSING emerged from CID headquarters. A Government Issue Colt 1911 pistol in a GI shoulder holster

made a considerable bulge under his field jacket. As he trotted down the stairs toward the parking lot, Lansing noticed Gary Clayton lurking behind some bushes. The kid aimed a slingshot at a trio of sparrows hopping along the sidewalk, pecking at some bread crumbs. Releasing the elastic band between the wooden Y, Gary fired a pebble at the birds, dusting one sparrow's feathers before they took flight.

"Okay!" Lansing snapped. "*Enough is enough!*"

He stomped into the bushes and plucked the slingshot from the startled boy's grasp. Gary demanded that the major return the instrument as Lansing trust it into a hip pocket.

"Those sparrows aren't hurting you and you don't intend to eat them," Lansing said, "so you have no reason to shoot those birds."

"My uncle will fix you! I'll tell my Dad, too!" the boy yelled.

"Tell anyone you want, kid," Lansing replied. "Maybe you can get your relatives angry and maybe I'll have to account to them, but it's about time you learned to consider something more than your own petty whims." Lansing fished his car keys from a pocket and stated, "You can hide behind your father and your uncle if you want, but you'll never be a man until you learn to accept responsibility for your own actions."

With that, he left Gary Clayton staring down at the pavement with his hands shoved into his pockets. Perhaps Lansing would regret what he'd said. *Right now*, he thought, *I have to catch a killer.*

USING THE LOCK PICKS, Lansing opened the apartment door to enter a dark room. He flicked on a penlight, closing the door as he played the narrow beam of light around the premises. It was a small sitting room with an even smaller kitchenette.

He began searching in the obvious places, under sofa cushions, in cabinet drawers and under the sink. Failing to find what he sought, he checked inside the refrigerator and under the carpet, and examined the furniture for evidence of recent patching.

Entering the bathroom, he checked the medicine cabinet and inside the toilet tank. Nothing. He left the bathroom door open and investigated a walk-in closet. Again, nothing. Moving to the single bedroom, Lansing opened dresser drawers, peeked under the mattress and inside the pillowcase. He still found nothing.

Finally, Lansing's search was successful. He found it under the bed. The penlight revealed two telltale lines of stitches indicating that slits had been cut into the bottom of the box springs and sewn shut. Using a lock pick, Lansing broke the stitches and ex-

tracted two small leather pouches with drawstrings. He crawled from under the bed and arose.

Opening a bag, he peered into it. The penlight beam illuminated several small, bright, sparkling gems. He put the first pouch in a pocket and checked the second bag. The contents were identical. He emerged from the bedroom. The sound of a door opening caused Lansing to toss his penlight aside and reach for his Colt pistol.

"No way, Major," a voice announced as a figure appeared in the doorway, silhouetted by the light in the hallway.

The man flicked on a light switch, and a ceiling fixture flooded the room with brightness. Lansing froze, his hand still gripping his holstered .45, as he saw a Luger P.08 gun muzzle staring back at him. SP6 Harrimon Baker held the pistol in a rock-steady grip.

"Take the gun out with your left hand. Two fingers, you know the routine," Baker instructed.

"Your taste in firearms has improved," Lansing remarked, exchanging the pouch from his left hand to his right as he obeyed. "What did you do with the .25 auto you used to kill Schmit with?"

"Oh, that little Bauer?" Baker said, kicking the door shut. "I disassembled it and threw half the pistol into the dumpster and the rest into the Furth sewer system. I bought the gun from a black

market dealer in Nuremburg, so there isn't any way it can be traced to me even if they find it." He gestured with the P.08. "This Luger belonged to Shroder. A little keepsake from the war."

"What tipped you off that I was in here?" Lansing asked, tossing the Colt aside, keeping his hands in plain view. "Or do you always enter your apartment with a gun ready?"

"I always place a strip of adhesive tape on the door frame when I'm going out for any length of time. It was broken, so I knew the door had been opened." Baker glanced at the pouch in Lansing's hand. "I see you found the diamonds."

"Yes." Lansing nodded, judging the distance between the specialist and himself. Baker was eight feet away, too far to reach him with a hand or foot. "You hid them well . . ." he said, shuffling closer.

"One more step and you're dead!" Baker snapped. "The traffic outside is always quite heavy at this hour. There are so many backfires from the cars in the street, no one would suspect a gunshot was anything out of the ordinary."

"Whatever you say, Specialist," Lansing replied, glancing about quickly. He noticed the bathroom was only three feet to his right.

"The only reason I don't burn you right now is because I want

to know how you found out."

"It was easy." Lansing shrugged. "You told me."

"Is that so?" Baker raised an eyebrow. "Well, perhaps you'll explain to me; but first, toss the diamonds over here. Where's the other pouch?"

"I've got it . . ." Lansing began, prying the bag in his hand open with an index finger.

Lansing threw the pouch to the floor near Baker's feet. The contents spilled out like so many marbles. Baker glanced down at the jewels for a scant second, but long enough for Lansing to move. His body low, he dove into the bathroom. A 7.65 millimeter bullet nearly hit him as Baker pulled the Luger's trigger, the misplaced round tearing into the plaster of a wall. Lansing slammed the door shut.

"This is absurd!" Baker snickered. "You're only prolonging your fate. There's no lock on that door and the window is too small to climb through."

Baker moved forward, keeping the pistol close to his chest to avoid any attempt to seize the gun. He raised a foot and kicked the door open. He obviously thought Lansing was hiding behind the door or around the corner of the doorway, prepared to jump him. He was wrong.

Lansing was directly in front of him on one knee. Baker barely saw him, hardly noticed the wooden Y-shaped object in the major's

left hand before Lansing released the elastic strap he'd pulled taut with his other hand.

A small, fast-moving object hit Baker in the face, splitting his cheekbone and knocking him flat on his back with a cry of agony. As he lay stunned, Lansing stepped forward and kicked the Luger from Baker's grasp.

"A bit primitive," Lansing declared as he raised the slingshot, "but it still works. Although King David never used such expensive ammunition."

A single diamond lay beside Baker's blood-stained head, its surface dyed red.

CAPTAIN MOSHE ZAVARJ entered Lansing's office. Major Conglose and SP5 Wendy Davis were present. Lansing briefly introduced them to the *Mossad* agent. Zavarj stared at the two leather pouches on Lansing's desk.

"I received the message you left at the Israeli Embassy. Very clever, Major," he said. "I assume those are the diamonds?"

Lansing opened one of the pouches and emptied its contents onto his blotter. The jewels flickered under the lights from the ceiling. "Would you care to tell us how you got involved in this business?" the major asked.

Zavarj sighed deeply. "We captured a minor war criminal, former Gestapo Lieutenant Wilhelm Muller, some six or seven months

ago. He told us he and some other Nazis stole the diamonds from a Yiddish jeweler during the Holocaust. Fearing capture, he'd passed the gems on to an old comrade, Captain Shroder, whom he met in Frankfurt. Muller hoped we'd go easy on him." Zavarj shrugged. "Anyway, Shroder suspected we'd be after him, so he changed his name and headed to Bavaria. It's a pity. Those diamonds would have been a nice addition to our national treasury. Who will get them now?"

"The diamonds are evidence for Baker's trial," Lansing answered. "What happens after that, I have no idea."

"That explains *Mossad's* involvement," Conglose said sourly. "But I still don't see how you knew Baker was the killer."

"Marty Dietrich, the bartender, told me Schmit had something of value anywhere in the world. Many items could fit into that category — drugs, money, gold to name a few," Lansing replied. "I suspected the truth when I reread Baker's two-o-one file. His father is a successful jeweler in New York City."

"How Schmit and Baker teamed up together will probably come out in the trial, but I imagine their common interest in medicine was how they first got to know each other. Schmit/Shroder learned that Baker could be his connection, not only to fence his stolen diamonds, but probably to flee

Germany to the United States to escape the *Mossad*.

"They had a good arrangement until Schmit recognized Dietrich. Fearful the bartender would expose him, Schmit tried to cut Dietrich into the deal to keep the former sergeant's mouth shut. Most servicemen learn a few words in German while stationed here. Baker probably overheard Schmit say *wertvoll*, 'valuable,' to Dietrich. He jumped to the conclusion that Schmit was trying to double-cross him.

"Baker probably gave Schmit some trumped-up excuse for leaving early and told the German to hide in the storage room in the basement, promising to meet him as soon as possible to discuss the diamond deal. As Schmit concealed himself, Baker and his friends made their trip to Nuremburg. Baker left the others at the brothel and hailed a cab back to Dyer Barracks. This gave him an alibi, one that was far from airtight, but better than Dietrich or Redlance could offer.

"Armed with a .25 caliber automatic, Baker forced Schmit to sit down and strapped him into the chair. As a medic, Baker is familiar with anatomy and he'd probably seen the results of torture employed by the Viet Cong, NVA and possibly ROK Marines while he was stationed in 'Nam. He applied his grisly knowledge to force Schmit to reveal the location of the diamonds. Then Baker

killed him."

"But, sir?" Wendy asked. "You weren't certain if Dietrich was telling you the truth about Schmit's claim that he had something valuable. How did you decide his story was valid?"

"As I told Baker, *he* told me. Rereading my notes from my discussion with him in the dispensary, I recalled that Baker was trying to convince me Redlance was guilty. He said, '*If anyone would want to torture Schmit and put a couple bullets in his brain, Redlance would be the one.*' How did Baker know how Schmit was killed? He even told me how many rounds were fired and where he'd shot Schmit." Lansing shook his head. "I must be getting old not to have noticed that sooner."

A knock on the office door drew their attention. A child's voice called, "Major Lansing?"

"Come in, Gary," Lansing replied.

The boy entered, nodding politely at the other adults as he walked to Lansing's desk. His manner had changed considerably since the major had spoken with him.

"You wanted to see me, sir," Gary said quietly.

"Yes." Lansing nodded as he opened a desk drawer and removed the slingshot. He handed it to the boy and said, "I want to return this to you. Thanks for letting me borrow it."

The Eleventh Day

by GROVER BRINKMAN

What Did the Carp in the Catfish Hole Have To Do with a Major Bank Robbery?

WITH THE EXPERTISE of the fisherman who is devoted to his hobby, Mike Myzell baited his line with the special catfish gunk that old Jim Dooley swore by, an ill-smelling gourmet lure exclusively for yellowbellies. He moved closer to the "big hole" in Cypress Creek, stepping lightly on the rocky ledge so as not to telegraph his approach, and let the lure sink to the bottom.

He was thirty-one, tall and lean, with the slim-hipped torso of an athlete. Yet at the moment the gleam in his brown eyes could have been the anticipation of a teenager exploring new turf. Cypress Creek meandered for miles before it emptied into the larger Neosho; it was noted for several species of the finny tribe. But in the cavernous "big hole"

near the highway bridge, one caught nothing but catfish. Mike had fished here innumerable times, with never a variation in species.

So when he pulled in a three-pound German carp, he squinted in amazement and disbelief at his catch.

"Now here's a puzzle in fish biology," he muttered to himself.

When he landed the second carp, even larger than the first — and a third — he closed his tackle box, threw the carp back into the stream in disgust, and hurried to his squad car parked nearby. And suddenly he was faced with a vexing question:

Why were the carp in this deep catfish hole?

There had to be an explanation, but at the moment he was merely

trying to evaluate a supposition.

It wiped the relaxed smile off his tanned face, and suddenly his lawman's mind was a computer, programming the events of the past eleven days, trying to equate a fishing-hole enigma with a local bank heist.

Eleven days of running down leads had wound him up tight as a child's mechanical top. Long hours of searching, interviewing, had all gone down the drain. Not one basic clue had emerged as to the whereabouts of the two people who had engineered a well-planned robbery of the Trust Building & Loan Association in downtown Leasburg.

He had gone down to the creek as a last resort, to unwind for an hour at his favorite catfish hole. But even this had only complicated his basic problem.

Another thorn in his flesh was the fact that the robbery had taken place on an afternoon when he was wet-nursing a young dope addict en route to a downstate penal institution.

He did not have a single word of criticism of his fellow officers, acting in his absence. They had risked their lives, and there had been no slip-ups. But the fact remained that he was not on the scene.

Anyone acquainted with Leasburg knows that the Switzer Pharmacy is across the street from the Trust Building & Loan office. Pharmacist Mattie Grimes was

leaving the store when she saw two men make a sprint for the front door of the bank. Faces were indistinct under stocking masks. She remembered as well that one was taller, more robust, than his companion.

Mattie, a calm young woman, had dialed the police within seconds, saying a robbery was in progress at the Trust Building & Loan.

Leasburg isn't what is called a free-access town. No interstate highways. A single two-lane leads in and out. A long barrier of limestone bluffs is a sharp line of demarcation to the north. On the southern perimeter is a strip-mine wasteland, a jungle long frowned upon by environmentalists.

Leasburg has four squad cars for its seven-man police force. Two of them immediately set up road-blocks on each side of town. Two others were braking to a stop in front of the bank building when the two masked men ran out.

John Caxton, a young recruit no doubt experiencing his first street action, fired a warning shot, shouted to the men to halt. The next moment he was on the street as a riot gun let loose. Luther King, his fellow officer, saw Caxton go down, dived for cover. He didn't quite make it.

This violent action encompassed perhaps fifteen seconds. Then it was all over, with two wounded men in the dirt.

MIKE, WHO HEADED the force, discussed the getaway at length with Chandler Higgs, a state highway patrolman who lived in Leasburg, key town in his patrol area.

"The car headed west," Chandler said. "Mattie Grimes is good for that statement."

"We had a highway road block at each edge of town," Mike continued, "before the men got out of the bank. No one showed."

"There are dirt farm roads going north, Mike. Even a logging road that winds through the strip-mine jungle."

Mike nodded. "Right! I'll concede that they could have taken any of these secondary roads. But they all dead-end. We've checked every house, knocking on doors. Nothing!"

"Even so, I have a feeling that they didn't escape the net," Chandler said with conviction. "I'd bet my best quail dog that they're not in the abandoned quarry mines, for I explored every tunnel. And yet I have a feeling that they're still right under our noses and we're blind as the proverbial mice!"

He was older than Mike. He'd been a highway officer for twenty-three years. He had seen various types of action, as Mike very well knew. There was a ridge across his right cheek that had been made by a bullet.

"Mattie Grimes should get some kind of commendation,"

Mike said.

"Right!" Chandler agreed. "We need more like her." Then he changed the subject. "How are Caxton and King?"

"Caxton is still in intensive care at the hospital," Mike said. "King was luckier, with a bullet through his left leg."

"One more thing," Chandler reminded. "Mattie is positive that King got in at least one lucky shot. Said she saw one of the men slump, and his buddy pulled him into the car."

"That's one in our favor."

"It could be that even now he's dead," Chandler said.

"I'm going out to recheck some of those mine shacks," Mike replied. "I don't trust those owl-hoots. If the price was high enough, they'd hide Judas himself."

"I'll tag along," Chandler said. "Let's play it safe the old buddy way."

THE BEATUP MAILBOX gave the miner's name as John Buss. The name, John, had been painted out and above it was the word Cindy, presumably his wife. They parked the car and headed for the tarpaper shack, surrounded by its rubbish of poverty. Mike was in the act of pounding his fist on the door when a boyish voice gave him a flat statement.

"Maw's not home."

He was perhaps nine, tousled-haired, dirty, barefoot. His red-

dened cheeks looked as if he might have been crying.

"Who are you?" Mike asked, tempering his voice.

"Lenny. Lenny Buss."

Mike also noticed something that seemed odd. Lenny was clutching an oblong tin box that had an unusual discolored label on its rusted side. He had taken something that looked like a soda cracker from the box and was munching it. It was apparent that fear was gnawing at Lenny's face.

"Where did you get that box of crackers, Lenny?" Mike asked.

The boy clammed up, stopped chewing.

"Let's see the can," Chandler said, and Lenny reluctantly handed it over. "Emergency rations," Chandler explained, examining the rusted tin. "Remember when Civil Defense got all concerned about fallout, back ten or eleven years ago, and issued caches of food to various districts?"

"That was before my time here," Mike said, "but I seem to remember that a food cache was deep inside one of the abandoned quarries, covered with plastic. Funny I never saw it when I patrolled the quarries —"

"I assumed the food was disposed of, long before this," Chandler said, handing back the box. "You know where the food cache is, Lenny?"

Lenny clamped his lips.

"Don't be frightened," Mike urged. "If you know how to get

to the food cache, we want you to guide us —"

"I — I'm scared," Lenny said, after a long pause.

"What are you afraid of?"

Again Lenny clammed up.

Chandler gently steered the boy to the car. "You show us, Lenny."

"I'm — real scared."

"Nothing will hurt you, son!"

AS THEY APPROACHED the escarpment, jutting limestone obelisks towered upward for a hundred feet or more. Mike headed down a familiar road that led to one of the mine openings, where he had previously explored. But suddenly Lenny was objecting.

"We're on the wrong road," he said.

"This is the only road to the quarry, son."

But Lenny wagged his head in the negative. "Old road, back there. It leads to the old mushroom farm."

This was news.

"Is that where the food is, Lenny?"

Lenny clammed up again, but his silence was its own answer.

Mike turned the car and swung into an old logging trail that had seen little travel, if the weed growth meant anything. Moments later the headlights picked out a small opening in a spur of the cliff wall.

Once they were through the opening, inside the cavern, the

vaulted roof seemed unusually high. Mike switched off the car's headlights, flipped on the spotlight, and zigzagged its beam back and forth as they wound deeper in the cavern.

"Good idea," Chandler said. He pushed Lenny down in the seat. "Keep low, son!"

Mike was thinking of the riot gun that had leveled two of his men. They would be sitting ducks, approaching in a car. The spotlight, swinging back and forth, might at least be confusing. Momentarily Lenny pushed up in the seat, despite Chandler's restraining hand.

"The food pile — right over there."

Mike swung the spotlight and saw the boxes piled high, covered with plastic. He kept the car rolling, exploring the perimeter of the cavern. Here were some of the mushroom beds, long abandoned. Finally they had circled the entire cavern, headed back to the food cache.

"This cavern has no connection with the quarry," Mike said, swinging the spotlight. "No wonder I never saw the food."

"You're not scared any more, are you, Lenny?" Chandler asked.

"Just what frightened you?" Mike put in.

"I — I heard a car," Lenny said.

Mike started exploring the area near the food cache, using his flashlight. There was a tear in the plastic at one spot, evidently made

by small fry as they swiped food. He picked up some of the packages: crackers, hard candy, bottled water. He was heading back to the car when Chandler's voice stopped him.

"Over there, Mike, to the left —"

Mike beamed his light on a piece of cloth, evidently part of a man's shirt. It was bloodstained. Chandler stooped and retrieved a small square of white linen, also reddened with blood. "Looks like a woman's handkerchief," he said.

One moment Lenny was there, the next he was gone, his receding footsteps fading into the darkness.

"Let him go!" Mike said. "I think we have some positive evidence now —"

"One was a woman!"

Mike was still exploring with his flashlight. "Look at this!"

"Car tracks, not ours."

Mike pulled up, faced Chandler. "I've got something to say. Until now, it was merely a hunch, so I kept it to myself. Now I'm positive."

He told Chandler about catching the three carp in the catfish hole.

Chandler whistled through his teeth. "Let's get some scuba gear and find out!" he said.

SLOWLY THE WINCH on the wrecking truck lifted the dead weight on the end of its cable. Bubbles dotted the pool's surface,

and the water muddied. The outline of a small compact car broke the surface of the spotlighted pool.

"Cindy Buss' car," someone said.

Mike saw the body at that moment, sprawled in the back seat. One of the car windows had been broken, the other was down.

"He's not local," Chandler said after a closer look.

A bullet wound, high in the chest wall, was clearly visible, evidence that Mattie Grimes was right in her statement that Luther King had gotten in a lucky shot.

"The jigsaw puzzle is falling into place," Mike said. "As I see it, the two holed up in the mushroom cavern, waiting for a chance to escape the area. But this jasper was hurt bad — and died. For some reason his buddy — the woman — loaded his body in the car and sank it in the deep catfish hole."

"Perhaps a last-ditch effort to avoid detection."

At that moment Mike saw Lenny standing to the right of the catfish pool. At his side was a woman of about 35, her face haggard as he stared at the car.

Chandler said softly: "Cindy Buss!"

They walked to the woman's side and piloted her away from the onlookers who had congregated at the scene.

"Why'd you do it, Cindy?" Mike asked.

She looked at him through

glazed eyes, her lips quivering. "He — he painted such a rosy picture. John was killed in the mine last September. And Ricky came at the right time. He had this riot gun, and kept telling me that the money in the bank was all coal money, and John had died needlessly because of the carelessness of those mine people. I had it coming, he kept saying. And at last I believed him. We worked it all out, a robbery, then a hide-out in the mushroom cavern that not many people know about. As soon as it was safe to leave, we'd pick up Lenny and go somewhere far off . . ."

"But Luther King got in a quick shot, and Ricky was critically hurt."

Her eyes were imploring. "He . . . he died two days later. I didn't know what to do. So I waited until late at night, ran the car into the catfish hole, brushed out the tire tracks . . ."

Mike headed her toward his squad car.

Suddenly she jerked up to face him, eyes questioning. "How did you . . . find out . . . about the car in the catfish hole?"

"I guess I'm a fisherman who got a lucky break," Mike said.

"I've fished this catfish hole since I was a kid. Never anything but yellowbellies. When I caught a German carp — and two more — I got suspicious. Carp are carnivorous, Cindy. The body in the car was the lure."

A Problem In Communication

by GARY ARPIN

Which Came First — The Chicken or the Chicken-Killer?
Ex-Sergeant Karp Tackles a Twisted Riddle . . .

"I'M THE CHICKEN," the man — is a guy dressed up like a chicken. . .
said.

"Don't feel too bad about it,"
said ex-Sergeant Karp. "Under
certain circumstances, anyone —"

"No, no," the man said, "not
a chicken. *The* Chicken. The
Newark Birds' Chicken. Maybe
you haven't seen me."

I had seen him. Everyone in
the area had seen the Birds'
Chicken. He was the guy who
dressed up in a chicken outfit
and fooled around in the stands
and on the field during the games,
leading cheers and generally
keeping things warm. It was only
a minor-league baseball team — a
pretty good triple-A team, actually
— but the Chicken seemed to have
touched some deep key in a lot of
people, because he had become
the most popular non-Italian
celebrity in New Jersey lately,
opening new bank branches and
the like. Makes you wonder what
we're like deep-down, if what it
takes to strike a chord down there

Anyway, he was the biggest
celebrity this office had seen,
except for the police chief, who
doesn't count.

This office is Karp and Drexler,
Private Enquiries, which I've been
trying to change ever since I got
here two years ago. The name, I
mean. For one thing, "Private
Enquiries" sounds like we spend
our time looking for millionaire's
cats, which I would like to do but
which we don't get much call
for. For another thing, there
hasn't been any Drexler for twelve
years, since he ran away with all
of the working funds and Mrs.
Karp. And for another thing, I'd
like to see my name in lights. Or
at least on a door. Karp and
Bierbauer. Although I'd settle
for Karp Associates.

I also keep pushing for an office
in the suburbs, since most of our
business is out there anyway, but
Karp likes the cheap rent and easy
access to The Downtown Lounge.

Anyway, the Chicken, whose

name was Jim Partle — “that’s pronounce *Partly*” — had a problem. Someone was trying to kill him.

He’d already had a couple of near misses — a bat on Bat Day and an empty whiskey bottle on Beer Nite, which if you ever wanted to stay home from a ballgame is the night to do it.

Karp was unimpressed. And so was I.

“Part of the game,” I said. “A big chicken’s a good target.”

“This isn’t a joke,” Partle said with a faint whine. He was about six feet, blond, maybe thirty-five. Your average chicken. “Look at this,” he said. He took an envelope out of his coat pocket and placed it on Karp’s desk.

“What’s this?” Karp said, looking at it like it was food he didn’t trust.

“Open it.”

“If this is a threat,” Karp said, “there may be fingerprints. You should —”

Partle interrupted him. “I’ve already been to the police about this. There aren’t any fingerprints.”

Karp tentatively touched the envelope. “What did they say?”

“The police?”

“Yes.”

“They said I should keep a file, so if anybody killed me they’d have something to work on.”

Karp laughed — just a little gurgle in his throat, really, not his honking laugh, which had been

known to clear shopping centers and which I don’t think is good for business. Karp is kind of . . . well, he looks like your sergeant in the army if you were stationed someplace like Fork River, Arkansas. Dumb and crude. Actually, he’s far from dumb, and sometimes he isn’t crude.

Anyway, Karp took the envelope and opened it and studied the note for a while. Then he examined the envelope itself, checking the postmark and the address. He strung this out for three or four minutes, as if he was going to say something like, “Ah, R-4 Rag Bond. The Gump family used that. You remember the Gumps, don’t you, Bierbauer?”

What he actually said was, “What do you want us to do?” He held out the sheet of paper and the envelope for me to take, so I got up from the old leather sofa where I always sit during these interviews and took them.

“I want you to find out who’s doing this,” Partle said.

The note was typed on an ordinary piece of typing paper. *Dear Chicken*, it said, *The world is sick of you and showoffs like you. If you don’t stop, I’m going to do something about it. Keep it up and you’re a dead duck.* I don’t know how Karp managed to get more than thirty seconds out of that.

“That may not be possible,” Karp was saying. He was leaning back in his chair, hands clasped

behind his neck. A confidence-display, I call it, and since Karp is six-four and about two-forty, he displays a lot of confidence. "Unless it's someone you know..."

I started to examine the envelope, which seemed even less revealing than the note. It was addressed to James L. Partle, in care of the Birds. Postmarked Newark. Fancy blue design inside.

"That's just it," Partle said. "I think it might *be* someone I know."

"Why is that?"

"Well, for one thing, the envelope."

"Oh? You noticed it, too?"

Partle gave Karp a strange look.

"Yes. The address. To James L. Partle."

"What's so unusual about that?" I asked. That is known as "asserting your presence," which is what I have to do a lot of around Karp. I'm a little smaller than he is.

Partle looked at me like I was a lot smaller, and bug-shaped.

"The initial," he said. "I don't use my middle initial. Oh, on very formal occasions, I do. I think my entry in *The Directory of American Executives* uses the L, but in this Chicken business, all the publicity, it's always been Jim Partle. It's not that the initial is any great secret, but if it was just a nut, he wouldn't know about it."

"Who would —" I began.

"What kind of business are you in?" Karp asked.

"I own a cannery. Desserts — custards, puddings, pie fillings. 'Are You a Partle's Pudding Lover?'"

"What?"

"That's our slogan. 'Are You a Partle's Pudding Lover.' You mean you never heard it?"

"Not that I remember," Karp is strictly a fast-food man. If it didn't come in a sack, he wouldn't know how to eat it. Of course, I had never heard of the stuff, either. I'm not any kind of pudding lover.

"It's very good pudding. I'll send you some."

"It's a successful business?"

Partle looked a little insulted and I guess he had a right to be. I mean, from the look of Karp's office, Partle could tell he wasn't dealing with any Perry Mason.

"I'm doing all right," he said. "Don't let this Birds business fool you. I'm not some out-of-season Santa Claus they stuffed into an outfit. I'm a fan. I do it for the kicks and for the team."

"Who would want to kill you?" I finally managed to ask. I know I'm no genius, but it seemed like an interesting question to me.

Partle shrugged at Karp. "I don't know."

"Who would want to threaten you?" Karp asked. That was a better question than mine, but it got the same answer.

"I don't know."

Karp looked at me like it was my fault this guy was here.

"Any enemies?" he said, sitting up straight. Sergeant Karp. "What about business competitors? Neighbors. Lovers."

"No, no," Partle said. "Nothing like that. Except for neighbors, maybe," he added for a moment. "You can never tell about the neighbors. The Fosters think I poisoned their dog. I didn't. Although I wasn't very upset when I found out somebody had. But they might just be crazy enough. They live behind us. Other than that, I don't know. The Parkers, maybe?" As if Karp and I played bridge with them. "Janet backed the car across their lawn once."

"YOU'RE RIGHT," I said to Karp after Partle had left, "we shouldn't move to the suburbs. Too dangerous. What with the dog-poisoning and the . . ."

Karp gave me his sergeant look. Headwaiters look at guys in leisure suits with the same kind of affection and respect.

"It's a friend of his," he said. "The only question is whether it's a joke or not. If it's a joke, it's not a very funny one."

"How do you know?"

"He's too weak a guy for a joke like that. Soft inside."

"No. How do you know it's a friend?"

"The envelope. You saw it."

"The initial?"

"No. The envelope. It's an Ashley."

I was holding the envelope in my hand. An ordinary white envelope. Blue design. Flimsier than most.

"You're kidding," I said.

Karp put his feet down and swivelled his chair toward me. He took the envelope.

"This is a very expensive envelope," he said. "Very good stationary."

"R-4 Rag Bond?"

"What?"

"Nothing. How can you tell?"

"First," he began, holding the envelope up. This is your rifle, men. "It's very fine paper. Almost silk. Second." He lifted the flap and held the inside of the envelope toward me. "It's got 'Ashley' written over and over inside." The blue pattern on the inside of the envelope suddenly made sense to me.

"Amazing, Karp," I said, "simply amazing." But he didn't say anything.

I TALKED to Partle's wife the next day, to see if she could add any names to our enemies list. She couldn't. Partle was a model husband except for the Chicken business, which seemed to me to be a pretty big except.

"I knew it would cause trouble sooner or later," she said. "I just knew it." She was a pretty woman, but fairly hefty. A Partle's

Pudding Lover, no doubt.

"I don't suppose you can stop him from doing it?"

I shook my head. "If you can't," I said, "I don't see how we can."

"Well, I mean, if his life has been threatened . . . it's such a foolish thing to do." *Even if your life hasn't been threatened,* I thought.

The neighbors weren't any help, either. Mrs. Parker was still steamed over Mrs. Partle's little detour across their lawn, but she seemed happy enough to take it out on Mrs. Partle's reputation. Mrs. Partle was shockingly overweight, a drinker and a shameless nymphomaniac.

Despite what Partle had told us, Mrs. Foster, behind them, though that Mrs. Parker poisoned their dog, and I was willing to believe her. But she wasn't too fond of the Partles either.

If I had gone to the stationery store first, I could have wrapped it up by early afternoon. As it was, I got to Things shortly after twelve and spent all afternoon and part of the evening driving around Milburn and Short Hills checking out my select list of Ashley users and mentally pricing houses. Not too many of them were in my bracket.

So I didn't see Karp until about eight o'clock that night. I knew he would want to hear my news and I wanted to see his face when I told him, so I went to his apartment.

Karp was apparently finishing

up a dinner with the Colonel when I got there. He came to the door holding one of those little wash-and-dry things they give you.

"Sorry," I said. "I didn't know you were bathing." Karp gave me his sergeant look and retreated into his apartment.

"Partle's dead," he said over his shoulder. Which knocked the hell out of my little surprise. "I was listening to the game on the radio. He was leading a cheer in a big crowd of people and somebody got to him. Ice-pick."

"That's impossible!"

Karp gave a short honk and cleared a place on the sofa for me by removing what looked like the remains of a small buffalo. Twenty years of army life had not made him a neat person.

"It was on the radio," he said. "Maybe it was Orson Welles having a joke."

"But it doesn't make any sense," I said. I sat down gingerly. "I found out who was responsible for the threat, and this doesn't fit."

"Oh?" Karp was sitting on his side of the sofa. Between us was apparently the Karp Memorial Library: paperbacks, newspapers, a pile of old *TV Guides*.

"Yes. It was Partle."

I told him the story quickly, trying to make it sound a little harder than it had actually been. The only shop that carried Ashley stationery was a place called Things. Their charge records

indicated that only five people had bought Ashley stationary in the last several months. Three perfectly innocent old ladies, one perfectly innocent eighteen-year-old girl who was summering in Europe, and one James L. Partle.

Karp tried to look like he'd known it all along, but I could see that it took a lot of effort.

"Which means," I said after we'd sat there a while, "that Mrs. Partle killed her husband."

Karp shook his head. "We've got to think about this," he said.

"Unless he sent himself the note and then killed himself."

"That's the point. Why send the note at all? I wish I knew that."

"To make it look like it was just a nut."

"A nut who used stationery that could be traced by any damn fool in a few hours?" The boss who sits home while the little guy does the work always thinks it's easy.

"Look at it this way," I said. "Mrs. Partle sent the note to divert suspicion. She thinks everybody uses Ashley stationery for their threatening notes." Karp didn't say anything, so I went on. "She just couldn't stand him running around in front of ten thousand people dressed like a chicken anymore. It wasn't in her marriage contract and she wasn't going to stand for it. So she sent him a note to try to get him to

stop, and when that didn't work, she decided to kill him." Karp still didn't say anything. "People have killed for worse motives. Wives have killed their husbands for putting ketchup on steak. Husbands have killed their wives for —"

"It doesn't make any sense," Karp said and went to the kitchen for more beer.

"I don't know about that. You bust your neck making a nice steak *au poivre* and your husband slobbers ketchup all over it . . ."

Since Karp was in the kitchen, I answered the knock on the door.

"I've got to talk to Karp," Partle said. "I heard the radio."

If Karp was surprised to see him, he hid it better than I did. All he said was, "Who's the dead man?"

"Al Cramer. He's my Executive Assistant."

"What was he doing there?"

"Filling in for me. He does that sometimes."

"What were you doing?"

"I . . . I had to meet a client."

"Who knew about the switch?"

Karp offered Partle my beer, which meant I had to go to the kitchen to get one for myself, but I heard Partle's answers.

"I knew. Al. My secretary — I had her call my wife. Al's wife. I suppose. The Birds' manager. Some people around the park. It had to be some nut."

"You don't really think that, do you?" Karp said.

"Then it had to be someone after me. After *me*." Like he was immune.

Karp's refrigerator was empty. Not completely — there were some interesting objects in there. But none of them resembled a beer can.

"You're a lucky man, Partle," I said when I came back to the living room. "You're alive, you've got an alibi, and you got the last beer."

"Why would I need an alibi?"

"Who were you with?" Karp asked.

"Well, there's a little problem there," Partle said.

The "little problem" was, it turned out, that he hadn't actually been with anyone. The client hadn't shown. I raised my eyebrows a few feet at this, but Karp didn't blink.

"Somebody saw you waiting," he said. "Somebody who can identify you."

"No." Partle's Puddings kept an apartment in New York for meetings with clients. No one, as far as he knew, had seen him enter or leave.

"Parking-lot attendant?"

"No. I parked on the street." Which made me sure the whole story was a fairy tale. You can ask me to swallow a lot, but I draw the line at available parking spaces on Manhattan streets.

"What's the problem?" Partle asked. "You're acting like you think I killed Cramer."

"Did you have a motive?"

"What are you talking about? Of course not."

"Did your wife have a motive?" I asked.

"Now just a minute," Partle began, and Karp told him about the stationery.

"It was *my* stationery?"

"You bought it."

Pause. "I see." Then, after another moment, "So you think one of us wrote the note." Karp didn't say anything. "And that one of us killed Al Cramer." Still no response. "Look, my business *needed* Al Cramer. He was doing wonders. You can check that. I wouldn't have killed him. Not for any reason. And my wife had absolutely no reason to kill him. She hardly knew him, for God's sake. You know, *I* was the one who was threatened. *I* was the one who . . ."

"There are other possibilities," I said, easing the pressure. "One real good one, assuming that she knew about the switch like you say, is Mrs. Cramer."

Partle gave a kind of a snort in my direction. "Not a chance," he said.

"How do you know?" I asked.

"Why don't you tell us where you were tonight?" Karp said. "And who you were with. The police are going to find out anyway."

"What do you mean?"

Karp has this look he uses in situations like this. It reminds you

of dinosaur days. Guess which one of you is the dinosaur.

"What a mess."

"We won't tell your wife. We're bit boys."

"This is going to wreck my life."

"I doubt it. Where were you?"

"How do you know Mrs. Cramer didn't —"

"Because I was with her, you idiot!" he snapped at me. Which is what I thought all along. Except for the idiot part, of course, which I'm leaving in for the sake of realism.

"So this Chicken thing . . ." Karp began.

"Sometimes I used it as a kind of . . . excuse. Not that often."

"Fiendishly clever," I said, but no one seemed to hear me. "That way you always knew where the husband was."

"No. This thing with Martha Cramer is new. Just a matter of . . . the way things worked out."

Partle had apparently had several liaisons during his time as Chicken. But his wife had found out about his philanderings and had threatened to divorce him if he didn't stop. I told him a divorce was better than a murder rap, but it didn't cheer him up appreciably. Karp finally sent him home after strongly advising him to go to the police first thing in the morning.

"If you don't like steak *au poivre* as a motive," I said to

Karp after Partle had left, "how about Chicken in the Sack?"

"His wife knew he wasn't in the outfit, Bierbauer," Karp reminded me. But I remained unconvinced. "Find out what you can about Cramer," he said. "We'll go talk to Mrs. Partle in the morning."

I CHECKED on Cramer the next morning. He had attended Rutgers, majored in Business Administration and had taken a job with Partle's Puddings after graduation. He was young, bright, handsome, and had never done a thing wrong in his life. Everybody loved him and nobody would want to kill him. My source of information was his brother-in-law, who answered the phone when I called Cramer's house. See if you can do better on a Saturday morning.

We surprised Mrs. Partle when we went out to visit that morning. Of course, if you saw Karp on your doorstep in an orange and yellow shirt, looking like a giant map of the surface of Mars, you'd be surprised, too.

Partle was off at the police station, which we had expected.

"I actually wanted to talk to you, Mrs. Partle," Karp said in his gentlest manner.

She settled us into the living room and brought us coffee and doughnuts, which I figured was the nicest thing a murderer had done for me in a long time.

"When did you find out,"

Karp said, diving right into it, "that your husband wasn't going to play the chicken last night?"

He was chewing on a doughnut as he asked the question, but it came through clearly. Karp's mouth is big enough to handle a doughnut and a question at the same time. So there had to be some other reason for her silence.

Finally she said, "But I didn't know." I grinned at Karp. *Killer Trapped By Own Words*, my grin said. He pretended not to pay attention. "In fact," Mrs. Partle went on, "I didn't know anything until this morning, when Jim told me. A horrible thing."

"But he told us he told you yesterday afternoon," I said. Mrs. Partle shrugged.

"No," Karp said. "He told us that his secretary told you yesterday. Did you talk to her at all? Maybe the message got garbled."

Mrs. Partle looked like she'd had a mouthful of bad lemon pudding. "I'm sure I would have remembered that," she said.

"Where were you last night, Mrs. Partle?" I asked. Karp gave me a dirty look — for stealing his question, I guess — but I wanted to know. Professional curiosity.

"I was here."

"All night?" Karp resumed the questioning.

"Yes."

"Alone?"

She shot him a sour look. "Yes," she said firmly. "And

I'm sure the neighbors will be able to tell you that I never left the house. Mrs. Parker is especially interested in my comings and goings."

I was beginning to like Mrs. Partle. She even looked less hefty than she had the other day. I was relieved to find out that she wasn't a killer, although it left me without a suspect. It looked like whoever did it intended to kill Cramer. Except that would mean somebody who knew about the switch. I grabbed a doughnut and thought about it.

"Why did you send the note, Mrs. Partle?" Karp wasn't going to let her off the hook.

"What do you mean?" she said, but that didn't work for long. Karp abstained from the dinosaur look, but told her about Things and pointed out that typewriters had certain identifying characteristics.

"I wanted him to stop seeing other women." She drew herself up in her chair. "My husband has had some bad habits in that regard."

"Why did you use that envelope?" I asked. "Didn't you know it was very recognizable?"

"Yes. I knew."

She had meant her husband to recognize the stationery, I realized then. It had been an indirect reproach, to show him that she knew what he was doing and to warn him to stop. An attempt to give him another chance to

reform, short of divorce, which she obviously didn't want.

"I knew," she repeated.

Which was when Partle came home.

"You knew, too," I said to him the minute he came through the door. "You knew all along who was responsible for that threat."

He glanced at his wife, then at me.

"Having your life threatened is no joke," he said sternly.

"You took it as a challenge."

"I took it as a death-threat."

"But you . . ."

"We've got a little disagreement here," Karp told him, interrupting me, "that we'd better straighten out. Did you or did you not notify your wife that you wouldn't be playing Chicken last night?"

"What are you talking about? What are you doing here, anyway? I barely get into the house—"

"We're doing the job you hired us for." Which was not exactly true, since we had already found out who sent the note, which is what he hired us for. "Did you or did you not notify—"

"Yes. For Christ's sake! Yes, I *did* notify my wife. Now —"

"How?"

"I told my secretary to call her. No, I left her a memo. She wasn't in the office when I left."

"Where did you leave it?"

"The memo?"

"Yes."

"I don't know. On her desk." Pause. "Or maybe on my desk."

Karp looked relieved. He sank back into the couch cushions and started working on another doughnut. "It's nice when things work out," he said, beaming.

I didn't want to say "What are you talking about?" so I started beaming, too.

"What are you talking about?" Partle said.

"I only need the answer to one more question, Mr. Partle," Karp said, brushing crumbs from his shirt, "and then we won't bother you any longer. When did you stop fooling around with your secretary?"

"I WAS RIGHT all along," I said. "Mrs. Partle *did* send the note. She did want him to stop."

"Fooling around, not playing Chicken at the ball park. On all the non-essentials, you were right." Bosses never want to admit that the little man can think.

We were at the Downtown Lounge, where Karp spends a lot of the time when he's not cleaning his apartment or at the ballet.

"The secretary was the only one who could have done it," he said.

"How could you be so sure? How did you know Partle didn't do it? He and Mrs. Cramer together."

"If Partle had wanted a divorce,

he could have had one. But he obviously didn't want a divorce. Therefore, Cramer wasn't a rival who needed to be put out of the way. He was at worst a slight inconvenience. Besides, nobody kills for love these days. And if anybody did, it wouldn't be Partle. I knew he was a weak guy the first time I saw him."

"And the secretary?"

"If Mrs. Partle didn't get the message and thus thought her husband was at the ball park as the Chicken —" Karp paused to take on beer. " — maybe that was because the secretary never got the message and thus thought he was at the ball park. And if she had a motive . . . well, there you are. Drink up."

When you drink with Karp, you drink by the pitcher. A four-star restaurant in Karp's book is one where they bring you a clean pitcher every round. The Downtown was a five-star: they brought you a clean glass every round, as well. You can see the difficulty in getting Karp to move to the suburbs.

Cheryl Baker, the secretary, had apparently thought that Partle was going to get a divorce and marry her. Nobody seemed to know where she got that idea. In any event, he dumped her and took up with Mrs. Cramer. So when she found out about the death-threat, she decided to take advantage of it.

"Not all ex-mistresses react the way Cheryl Baker did, fortunately," I said, wiping foam from my moustache, "or the world would be all over bodies."

Karp gave me a sharp look. "Is that a quote?" he said.

"Yes," I lied. "So she simply didn't get the memo."

"She didn't get the memo. She never bothered to go back into his office after he left. And the memo was on his desk. What you have there," he said, looking at me sideways, "is a problem in communication."

I pretended not to notice. "What I don't understand is why he sent the message at all, or intended to send it." I didn't, and as much as it hurt, I had to ask. "I mean, he was using the Chicken thing to give him an alibi for his little adventures, right? Then why, when he was going off with the marvelous Mrs. Cramer, did he tell his wife he *wasn't* going to be in the Chicken outfit? Why not just let her think he was at the ball park?"

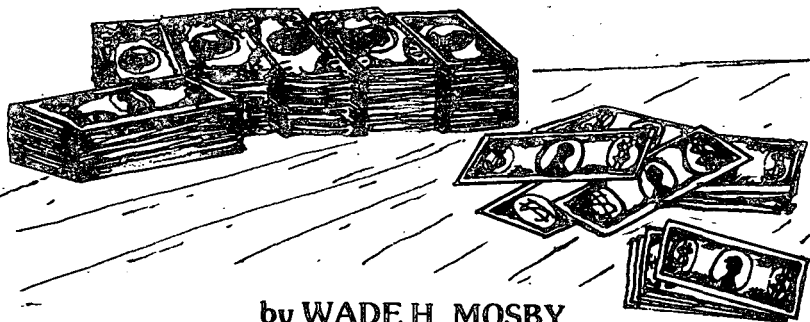
Karp took a long swallow of beer. "She *knew* about that dodge, Bierbauer. He was trying to change his image. If he wanted to appear innocent, he had to have some new excuse."

"So by telling her he wasn't playing the Chicken . . ."

"He would appear honest."

"Fiendishly clever," I said. And this time he heard me.

Meet Me At The Cash Bar



by WADE H. MOSBY

Where Would You Hide One Thousand Hundred-Dollar Bills? Well, If You Were Doing Some remodeling . . .

A LONE FLY explored the pile of reports in front of Lewis, looking for some tidbit. Watching the fly, Lewis lost his concentration. He pushed his chair away from the desk and stared moodily out of the window.

When he had joined the department, open windows invited flies all summer. Progress had brought air conditioning and closed windows. The fly on his desk was almost a museum piece. And, Lewis thought grimly, so was he.

After seven years behind the chief's desk, things somehow seemed more complicated than ever. Reports to be made, electronic gadgetry to master, training sessions to plan, \$100,000 in ran-

som to find . . .

That was the sore spot. Find it and you've solved a kidnapping. Get that off your mind and things wouldn't seem so complicated.

A knock on the door stopped his reverie.

"Come in," he said.

Lieutenant Downey eased his long frame into the chief's office. Downey and Lewis had joined the force at the same time, and had been friends through the years. Lewis liked Downey, respected his thoroughness.

"It's about Jakes, sir," Downey began.

"Hold it, Joe," the chief said. "I can't get used to your 'sirring' me."

"Right." Downey put some more reports on the chief's desk. "Jakes is waiting outside. He has some theories, I guess you'd call them."

"I'll hear what he has to say, Joe," Lewis said. "We haven't got much else and the commissioners are starting to get on my back again."

"Don't let 'em get to you, Mike. They get heat from the mayor, he gets it from the taxpayers. It isn't often we get a kidnapping."

"It's not a kidnapping now, Joe," Lewis said, waving the fly away from his head. "That's over. The kid's back and safe. Old man Adler forked over the hundred grand in C notes. Our only problem is, who's got it now?"

Downey nodded.

"It's only money, Mike. We've got a pretty good idea who has it. We botched the drop — let's face it, we all but handed that cash over on a silver tray. But when we find it . . ."

"Yeah, I know, Joe. We have the serial numbers. If Mojo tries to move any of it, we've got him. But when is he going to try?"

"He doesn't have to. Not right now. He can take his sweet time, and when he thinks we've forgotten about it, he'll make his move. Maybe Vegas. They take in hundred-dollar bills like we'd change a buck."

"Or overseas," the chief said.

"Or sell it. But I doubt if Mojo Dorn would discount a hundred grand. He might end up with about half of that if he let somebody else launder it. But why should he? He's got it tucked away somewhere, and somehow we'll find it."

"He has to be a little tense, Mike," Downey said. "He knows we're watching him, waiting for him to start spending. That bowling alley he owns is costing him a bundle."

"How so? I thought that place was a gold mine. Twenty-six lanes, bar, ballroom for catered weddings, pinball machines, pool tables."

Downey eased into the hard-backed chair.

"Right," he said. "But he has expenses, on top of whatever gambling debts he might have run up. Jakes says Mojo is redecorating the place. Plans to turn the ballroom into a disco."

"No law against it — if he gets a dance hall license," the chief said.

The two of them sat there, each wrapped in his own glum thoughts. People get used to efficiency. They expect things to run well. They aren't ready for the aberration, the time when somebody pulls off a crime and gets away with it. It made Lewis feel that he was losing his grip. There were no new ideas coming through the ranks, no heroes waiting for medals.

Mojo Dorn. If anyone pulled off a hundred-grand caper in this town, it was either Mojo or someone working for Mojo. But Mojo was clean. He could recite his rights along with any cop reading them to him.

And he had never been pinned to a thing. So far as the law was concerned, Mojo was clean, and the district attorney had reminded Lewis of that fact repeatedly. It was hard to lean on Mojo.

Lewis pounded his fist on the desk.

Downey was startled.

"Pardon, chief?"

"Sorry, Joe," Lewis said. "This thing is getting to me. Does Jake have anything?"

"He read your notice about your open door policy . . . 'If you have something for the chief, don't be afraid to tell him.'"

"Jakes. Jakes. Oh, yes. He's the guy you sent over to my daughter's house Christmas Eve when the bathtub clogged up. Pretty good plumber. A bit flaky as a cop. Well, send him in."

Downey made a halfhearted about face and left the office.

Jakes was forever having ideas. Most of them didn't pan out. Yet somehow Jakes appealed to Lewis, maybe because he was young and enthusiastic, a patrolman for two years who had a way of keeping his eyes open. He had helped break a couple of cases, mostly — it seemed to Lewis — on sheer luck.

The door opened and Jakes let himself in. He smiled uncertainly at the chief and saluted.

"Sit down, Jakes," the chief said, returning the salute with a wave toward the hard-backed chair. "I understand you have some ideas about the Adler case."

"Yes, sir," Jakes said, settling uneasily into the chair. "I've been thinking about it a lot and talking to some of the detectives."

"And?"

"And what we're looking for is a place where one hundred bills, C notes, could be hidden, maybe right under our noses, a place we wouldn't ordinarily think of."

"I know that, Jakes. Have you come up with a new hiding place?"

"Well, perhaps, sir. I've been doing some remodeling at home, and it hit me, all of a sudden —"

"Jakes," the chief interrupted. "What does your remodeling have to do with the Adler case?"

"I was just getting to that, sir." Jakes shifted uncomfortably in the chair, the hard wood starting to pain his wiry body. "You see, Mojo Dorn is doing some remodeling, too."

It was going to be a long day, Lewis thought.

"Get to the point, Jakes."

"Yessir. Mojo put up a new wall for his disco. Changed the face of the bar. He did a lot of the work himself. Don't you see, sir, where the money could be?"

"In the wall?"

"A possibility. Between panels. Safe. Under our noses. Easy to get to when Mojo decides to make his move, when it has cooled off a little."

"Jakes, have you figured out how we're going to look inside that wall? Do we get a search warrant for a wall?"

"I was just getting to that, sir. Mojo doesn't know me, doesn't know I'm a cop, er, policeman, sir."

"So?"

"So if you could see your way to assigning me to the case, in plain clothes, you understand, I might be able to get in there."

Lewis stared at Jakes. He had some fresh ideas, all right. Lewis wondered how the district attorney would feel about this one, if he heard about it.

"You'll find us a lawsuit, Jakes, you go in there busting up Mojo's place."

"I wouldn't really bust anything."

"Do you plan to go at this alone?"

"At first, sir. When I'm pretty sure of exactly where to find the money, I'll need a hand."

"What kind of hand?"

"Well, sir, I thought perhaps you could be there when the money is found."

"Jakes," Lewis said through his teeth, "you probably are nuts. But at least it sounds like somebody's doing something besides

making excuses, and to tell you the truth, just sitting here is driving me nuts."

"Then I can start on the case?"

"I'll make the arrangements with Lieutenant Downey. As far as the rest of the department is concerned, you're on vacation."

TWO WEEKS LATER, Downey reported that Jakes wanted to see the chief that night at a downtown bar. Lewis hated going out at night, especially on wild goose chases, but he was in Jayshaw's Tap at nine, wondering what Jakes had to report.

"Good evening, chief."

Lewis did a double take on the man sitting next to him. Under the light chin stubble, under a reddish wig, was Jakes.

"How's it going, Jakes? Why the fright wig?"

Jakes looked around to make sure there were no eavesdroppers.

"Well, I *am* under cover, chief."

"Right. What's new?"

"There's progress, all right. Mojo has put up a new wall for a bar in a corner of the old ballroom. You could hide a million in bills in that wall."

"And?"

"I've slipped in there a time or two to take a look. It's behind canvas, but there's no problem getting in there."

"Does anybody there know what you're up to?"

"Naw," Jakes said. "A lot of

guys are out of work just now. They spend time bowling. If anybody has noticed me, they think I'm just another guy waiting for my unemployment compensation check."

"So what have you found?"

"Well, sir, I know something about construction. Built a few walls at my own house. With a little help, I could pry up the paneling on that bar wall and —"

"How little help do you mean?"

"Basically, I need somebody to hold the light."

"Me? Hold the light?"

"Well, sir, you said you didn't want to get any other officers involved in this, except for Lieutenant Downey . . ."

"All right. What am I to hold a light on?"

"Just the bar. Until I get the pry bar under the paneling."

Lewis thought about it. Jakes was talking about burglary. Well, maybe not exactly burglary. Still, Mojo had never played the books. Lewis had always gone with the letter, and where had it gotten him?

"Jakes, if you are wrong about this, I can see no way that we both are not going to get busted. And I've got a lot more at stake than you have. I hope you know that."

"I do, sir."

"One more thing. If anything goes wrong, I call in Downey."

"Absolutely, sir." There was something about Jakes' confidence that galled Lewis. He re-

sented the idea of leaning on a raw investigator. But where else was there to lean?

"Okay, Jakes, when?"

"Tomorrow night, about this time, at Mojo's Lanes. I'll be there."

Jakes left quietly. Lewis stared at his beer. What the hell, why not have another?

Lewis knew — and apparently Jakes had found out, too — that Mojo had left town for a few days. Lewis was tracking him. He wouldn't unload any big cash. Tomorrow would be a great time to go bowling. It was unlikely that the countermen and bartenders would recognize him.

JAKES WAS THERE, working away at a pinball machine, when Lewis arrived. Lewis watched the bowling for a minute or two, then went over to the machine next to Jakes, and dropped in a quarter.

"Next room," Jakes whispered. "About five minutes."

Lewis nodded. He whacked at the flippers on his machine and knocked the steel ball out of play. Why did people pour money into these things? Lewis moved off in the direction Jakes had indicated.

Jakes' "Pssst!" stopped him at the entrance of the darkened ballroom.

"In here," Jakes said, pulling back the doorway tarpaulin.

Lewis slipped behind the canvas, and in the darkness made out Jakes, holding a pry bar.

"What now?" he whispered to Jakes.

"We check out the paneling on the front of this bar."

"Won't they hear you?"

"With all the racket from those bowling balls? No way."

Jakes handed Lewis a penlight, and the chief managed to get it turned on. A puny circle of orange picked out the new paneling on the bar front.

Lewis hunkered down in the gloom.

"Won't be long now," Jakes grunted.

"Hurry it up! I don't want to be caught in this place."

"Got it!" Jakes said. The pry bar slipped under an edge of the paneling, and with Jakes puffing and straining, the front panel squeaked and squealed until it flapped open.

Lewis pushed the light under the paneling, and knocked heads with Jakes trying to look inside the wall. There was nothing there.

"Now, don't give up, chief," Jakes said. "See that two-by-four there? Yeah, that one. Right behind that, there's another sizeable space. I'll just take this bar and, ugh, get it, ugh, pushed. . ."

Lewis looked at his watch. He couldn't see the hands. If both he and Jakes were sent up the river he'd put in a request for separate cells.

"We're (puff) getting (grunt) there, chief!"

Lewis wondered if Jakes was

reading his mind.

The pry bar fell out of Jakes' hands as hot water began spurting in the darkness, drenching both men and spewing onto the corner wall.

"No sweat, chief," Jakes said before Lewis could get his mouth open. "I'll have this turned off in a second."

Jakes groped in the darkness and somehow shut off the water-spout.

"Jakes," Lewis said, "I'm calling Downey. I'm going to put this in the book as an attempted burglary we were investigating. Get your tail out of here right now."

"Hold it just a second, chief," Jakes said. He took the penlight and pointed it at the wall where water still was running down the new, jungle-patterned wallpaper.

"Lousy job of papering," Jakes said. "I could do better than that. Look at the lumps."

"Never mind, Jakes! You'll get your lumps if you don't get out of here —"

"It'll only take a second, chief," Jakes said. He lifted the edge of the paper, and a whole wet section peeled back to the floor. Pasted to the wall behind the paper were hundred-dollar bills. Lewis knew there would be a thousand of them. He lifted his walkie-talkie from his belt.

"Come in now, Downey. We're at the cash bar."

"Ten-four, chief."

Lewis flipped on the ballroom lights as Downey came in.

"Surprised to see you here already, chief," he said for the benefit of anyone who might be listening. "We got a call about a break-in—"

"I heard it," the chief said. It was just a little lie. "Just happened to be in the neighborhood."

Downey took in the sopping wallpaper and the green decor of bills still stuck to the wall. He whistled slowly.

"Somebody must have known where that was," he said. "Almost took it right out from under Mojo's nose."

"Right," Lewis said. "Wonder who it was? We must have gotten here just in time."

Lewis looked at Jakes.

"Clear out, now. Report to my office in the morning. There are a few things I'd like to have explained."

"Yessir." Jakes left promptly.

THE CLEANUP — photos, questioning — routine took most of the night. Mojo was picked up at a motel near a race track in Miami. He couldn't understand how Lewis had gotten onto the bills. There was more tension than he needed, and he confessed.

It was afternoon before Lewis got back to his office. Jakes was waiting outside, clean-shaven, rid of the wig, in uniform.

"You, Jakes. Yes. I want to talk

to you. Sorry I'm late. Come in."

Jakes settled into the uncomfortable chair.

"You said you had some questions, sir?"

"Yes, Jakes. How did you know about the wallpaper?"

"The wallpaper? Sure, chief. I've done a lot of it around the house. Doesn't take much hot water to loosen up fresh wallpaper. That was strippable paper, by the way. You get it —"

"I don't care where you get it, Jakes. And if you hadn't bungled your way into that water pipe, we still wouldn't have a clue."

"Bungle?" Jakes sounded hurt. "No way, chief. You won't find a mark on that pipe. And I nailed the paneling back, too."

"What do you mean? That pipe nearly drowned us."

"Not quite, chief. That was the spray attachment from the bar sink. I just thought, as long as we were there and all, we should take a look behind the paper as well as behind the panels."

"Well then, why did you start out by getting me soaked?"

"Nobody's perfect, chief."

Lewis glowered at Jakes, but he felt something coming on. It was the first time in months he had had that feeling.

"See you tomorrow, Jakes," he said gruffly.

When Jakes had left, Lewis felt he could indulge himself.

He laughed. And laughed. And then some.

Someone With A Knife

by PATRICK SCAFFETTI

Faye and Leo Were As Unlikely a Pair of Detectives As You Could Find — But When it Came to Solving a Double Murder, They Ran Rings Around the Police!

THE BONY BLACK CAT lay curled on Faye's ample lap as though it had been accustomed to a life of luxury. Its body testified otherwise. One ear was little more than a jagged stump, and tiny scars crisscrossed its broad, implacable face. Half of its tail had been lost in some long-forgotten alley brawl. As I stared at the creature, one yellow eye opened to a slit, observed me without interest, then closed. The other eye was missing.

Faye gently stroked the cat's head and back. "Poor fellow," she said in her gravelly voice. "I found him in the back alley this morning, rummaging through the trash. The minute I opened the door, he dashed inside. By the looks of him, you'd think he'd be leery of people, instead of eager to jump onto the first lap that'll have him."

"Maybe he can sense a sucker for strays," I said, drawing on my pipe.

Through a half smile, Faye said, "You might be right, Leo. I've certainly had more than my share of strays over the years. Enough so that you could write a book about them."

"You know, that's an idea," I replied casually, but the suggestion gave me a twinge of uneasiness. When I was twenty-one, I'd rented an apartment down the street from Faye's novelty shop with the intention of writing a novel. I'd even had a title in mind — *Michelangelo's Dropcloth*. The city would be a fine inspiration, I'd thought, teeming with life and stories. That was fifteen years ago, and the apartment building where I lived was now more of a flophouse than anything else. But the book had never come. I was

confident that it was just a matter of time, though.

To earn enough money to pay the rent and keep myself fed, I worked as a handyman at the apartment house. The job made few demands on my time or intellect, and I had plenty of leisure hours to do what I liked. I spent huge chunks of time at the public library, pursuing my greatest passion — reading. If I dedicated one-quarter as much time to writing as I did to reading, I'd need a dozen pseudonyms. As it was, my muse generally napped while I read. Sometimes, I worried that it had died peacefully in its sleep.

"Many customers today?" I asked, hoping to change the subject.

Faye shook her head. "Nope. Couple of kids came in to buy some sulphur perfume, and the regulars stopped in for pop and candy. Other than that, things have been pretty slow."

"You ought to broaden your line," I said. "Bring in some fancy gifts and imported items. Before you know it, this place will be booming."

"I just might do that one of these days, Leo," Faye said. But I knew that she never would. I'd been offering the same advice for over ten years now, and her answer was always the same.

Faye's novelty shop was located on a dingy side street in the middle of the city. On the same

block was the Round-the-Clock Restaurant, Markham's Used Furniture, Harry's Jiffy Shoe Repair, Lady Leona — Fortune-Teller, the decrepit apartment building I called home. Bennett's Pawn Shop, and Gilbert's Bar. Only Gilbert's was turning a steady profit.

The interior of Faye's shop was small and cramped. Every available inch of wall space was covered with tricks and novelty items — peppered chewing gum, whoopee cushions, flies encased in plastic cubes, hand buzzers. Rubber shrunken heads with their mouths sewn shut dangled from the ceiling. A soft drink cooler stood in the corner like some prehistoric beast. Across from it, a wooden counter supported by a bulky, old-fashioned cash register and stacks of gum, candy, and cigarettes. Rows of lifelike rubber masks lined the wall behind the counter. Frankenstein's monster, Quasimodo, the Wolfman, and leering skulls peered out from hollow eye sockets.

Faye herself sat on a folding chair behind the cash register, and not a few customers had mistaken her face for one of the masks. Only the constant stream of cigarette smoke from her mouth confirmed that the plump, ageless features framed by billowing tangles of gray-black hair were flesh instead of rubber.

Hidden from view, Faye's body was fat, out-of-shape from a

sedentary existence. Conversation and deduction were her fortes, not physical activity. In fact, she rarely left her shop. Whenever she needed something, one of her other friends or I would run the errand for her. Faye was somewhere in her fifties, but she would admit to no exact age. She rarely mentioned her life prior to opening the shop, and she'd deftly parry any questions about her past.

My own stool up alongside of the counter was pretty much of a permanent fixture in the place, too. It was the spot I'd occupied more than any other over the past several years. From here, I could talk with Faye and still keep an eye on the street. Through the streaked glass of the small display window, I had a direct view of the pawn shop across the way and the alley next to it.

Glancing at the alley now, I felt sadness mixed with fear. Exactly two weeks ago, early on a Saturday morning, Heather Storm had been stabbed to death in that alley. Heather had worked as a singer at the Gala Club, and she'd lived across the hall from me in the apartment house. The nightclub was a couple of blocks away, and Heather had always taken a shortcut home through the alley after her final performance of the night. Two weeks back, someone with a knife had been waiting for her.

The street was dark and quiet

now, and only an occasional straggler passed by the window. It was shortly after two a.m. Faye closed her shop at nine, but neither one of us had anywhere else to go. Faye's apartment above the shop was just as lonely as mine, so we'd often sit together into the wee hours, talking and passing time.

"Who could have done such a horrible thing?" Faye asked, reading my mind.

I shrugged. "There are a lot of maniacs running around these days."

"Heather had a heart of gold," Faye said, as though to herself. "She would never have hurt anyone. You've got to be crafty and streetwise around here to survive. Just like this cat here. Heather never learned the knack."

"She was a good kid," I agreed. "I'll miss her."

"So will I. She used to stop in sometimes just to chat. She once told me that I was one of the closest friends she'd ever had. She was so pretty, so kind. What a senseless tragedy."

We sat without speaking, both lost in memories of the lovely young girl who had been cruelly butchered less than twenty yards away. Finally, Faye yawned and stretched. Her wrinkles rearranged themselves into a kaleidoscopic pattern, then relaxed back into place.

"I'm getting tired, Leo," she

murmured. "Think it's time to call it a night."

"I'm bushed myself," I said, reluctantly rising from my stool. "I'll stop by tomorrow."

"See you then, Leo. Good night." Faye cradled the black cat in her arms, and hefted her Buddha-like bulk from the chair.

"Night, Faye," I said, then stepped out the front door into the cool spring air.

THE BLOCK was deserted and silent, and the only light came from a flickering street lamp on the corner. My footsteps slapped softly on the pavement as I began walking the short distance to my apartment building.

Suddenly, I stopped and listened carefully. A low whimpering noise was coming from the alley across the street where Heather Storm's slashed body had been found. My heart pounded fearfully as I took a hesitant step into the street. The sound grew louder, and a feeble voice moaned, "Help me."

I crossed the street and called out, "Who's there? What's the matter?"

"Help me. Stabbed." The voice sounded familiar.

Through the darkness, I made out the vague form of a man lying on the ground. His knees were drawn up to his chest, and he rocked weakly back and forth.

I hurried into the alley, stooped beside him, and recognized

Freddy Lavis, the impressionist at the Gala Club. He looked up at me in wide-eyed terror as he clawed at his stomach.

"Freddy, it's me, Leo Reynolds," I said. "Who did this to you? Who stabbed you?"

Freddy's eyes squeezed shut, and an expression of grim concentration crossed his face. With a painful effort, he began to speak in a high-pitched woman's voice. "I swear to you that we'll help out in every way we can. But he shouldn't have to sacrifice the rest of his life for one mistake. No, please. Oh, God no!"

The voice ended with a sharp gasp, as if the speaker had been struck in the stomach. A sensation of utter horror crept over me when I realized that Freddy had been speaking in the voice of Heather Storm.

"What about Heather?" I asked. "What are you trying to tell me, Freddy?"

Freddy's hands began making circular motions over his blood-drenched belly, and his eyes begged me to understand. Suddenly, he reached up, grasped my arm, and pulled me close. Slowly, his eyes sagged shut, and he made a gagging sound. His hand slipped from the sleeve of my jacket and curled into a loose fist on the ground. There was no doubt in my mind that he was dead.

I remained beside the body without moving, trying to make sense out of what had just hap-

pened. Freddy Lavis had lived in the same apartment building as me, and he'd worked at the Gala Club for the past five or six years. He was not very smart, but he had a gift for reproducing voices exactly as they sounded. I had seen his act once, and his ability to imitate voices had amazed me. He could listen to a man or a woman talk, right down to the pitch and the intonation. Half of the time he probably had no idea of what the words actually meant, but his imitation was flawless.

At the Gala Club, Freddy performed on stage twice a night. Most of his act consisted of impressions of movie stars and political figures, but the final few minutes were devoted to the audience. He would repeat verbatim snatches of conversation he had overheard while wandering about the tables earlier in the evening. Usually, members of the audience were delighted to hear voices of others in their party duplicated so perfectly, and often the segments of conversation were hilarious when presented out of context.

Now, Freddy lay dead, brutally stabbed in the same alley where Heather Storm had been murdered. Both had worked at the Gala Club and lived in the same apartment building. Freddy's final words had been spoken in Heather's voice. Had they been her last words also? I wondered.

With a start, I realized that I

had to call the police. Glancing back over my shoulder, I saw that Faye's shop was already dark. I had no telephone in my apartment, but there was a pay phone in the lobby of the building. I stood up and raced down the block. I found the number of the police department in the tattered phone book and dialed the number. A disinterested voice took down the information and assured me that a patrol car would arrive as soon as possible.

I almost expected the police car to be parked in the alley by the time I got back, but nothing had changed. I paced back and forth nervously beside Freddy's corpse for over twenty minutes before a blue-and-white finally appeared. The car stopped several yards away from the body, and two uniformed policemen climbed out. One was tall and the other short — both were ruler slim.

"What's the problem here?" asked the short skinny cop, who was smoking a cigar.

Briefly, I described how I'd discovered Freddy only moments away from death and how he had behaved. They didn't seem overly impressed with his final words.

"Yeah, I've seen his act at the Gala," said the tall skinny cop as he knelt beside Freddy. "He wasn't bad. Caught Alice off guard and imitated her saying she had to go to the can." He chuckled at the memory. "But he was probably confused from

loss of blood and just mumbling nonsense. I wouldn't put a whole lot of stock in his dying message."

The short cop moved his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other. "What were you doing out here so late?" he asked. "This sure isn't the safest place to be taking a stroll in the middle of the night."

I told him that I'd been returning to my apartment from Faye's shop.

"Is that right?" he asked sarcastically, while his partner went back over the car and spoke into a microphone. "We're going to have to check that story."

The tall cop returned a moment later. "Things should really start jumping around here before long. Homicide is on its way over. You might as well take it easy, Leo. You've got a long night ahead of you."

A car suddenly pulled into the alley, its headlights blindingly bright, and came to a halt close to Freddy's body. Three men hopped out, and, after exchanging a few words with the two skinny cops, they briskly set to work around the corpse.

The short cop motioned for me to get into the back of the blue-and-white.

Feeling sick to my stomach, I obliged.

Four hours later, a friendlier, more substantial pair of cops dropped me off in front of my apartment building. I looked down

the street toward Faye's, but the shop was dark. I knew that a few hours earlier she had been awakened and questioned by the police to verify my story, but, obviously, she had not waited up to find out what happened.

Wearily, I entered the building and climbed the steps to my second floor apartment. Minutes later, I was in bed and fast asleep.

I AWOKE shortly before ten, feeling tired and depressed. I lay in bed, glancing around my small room, trying to muster the energy to get up. Books were stacked everywhere, and my typewriter was set up in a corner, covered with dust. Seeing this depressed me even more. Slowly, I climbed out of bed and padded over to the window.

A gray drizzle shrouded the day. To the right, I could see a battered garbage can at the entrance to the alley, and, for the first time, I felt the reality of Freddy Lavis's death. The simple, quiet little man who imitated voices had been murdered. Why? I asked myself. Who would want him dead?

With little enthusiasm for the day ahead of me, I got dressed, then walked down the block to Faye's shop. It felt warm inside after the penetrating chill of the morning, and I could smell coffee brewing. As always, Faye was perched behind her cash register. The lean black cat rested comfortably on her lap. No one else was

in the shop.

Faye looked at me grimly. "I heard," she said. "How are you, Leo?"

I shrugged. "How should I feel after finding a friend dying and then being questioned by the cops half the night? Tired, depressed, a little crazy, maybe."

"I kept the coffee on for you," she said, pouring me a steaming cupful. "The police got me up at three-thirty in the morning. They wanted to know if you'd been here. They told me that Freddy had been murdered, but not much more."

Between scalding sips of coffee, I filled her in on the details. When I finished, Faye stared sadly through the display window at the wet street. Finally, she said, "He must have been killed while we sat here talking. Just like Heather. In two weeks' time, two people who live in the same apartment house and work at the same nightclub are stabbed to death in the same alley. There's got to be a connection."

"The police as much as said the same thing, but I got the distinct impression they weren't going to knock themselves out to *find* the connection."

"That doesn't surprise me. They asked me a few questions about Heather and Freddy last night, and that was the end of it. There are so many crimes committed in a city this size that I guess you really can't blame them.

They work long and hard on the big blockbuster cases, but Heather and Freddy just aren't that important. No family to speak of, no wealth, no influential friends. Whoever killed them will probably go scot-free — unless we do something, Leo."

"What can we do?" I asked.

"We probably knew Heather and Freddy as well as anybody around here, and I'm certain that the same person murdered both of them. We can do some investigating of our own."

"But how? I wouldn't even know where to begin."

Faye stubbed out a cigarette, lit a new one, and drew in a deep breath of smoke. "Okay," she said, "the way I see it, Freddy wasn't bright enough to get into any real trouble without some help. He probably knew something about Heather's murder. From his dying words, I'd guess he saw it happen or, at least, overheard something. He was killed to keep him quiet about what he knew."

"But wouldn't he have gone to the police right away if he knew something?"

Faye shook her head. "Freddy was scared to death of the cops. He once told me that they'd given him a hard time when he was a kid. He was never very quick, and he was a convenient scapegoat for anything that went wrong in the neighborhood."

Faye paused a moment, then

said, "Leo, I'm convinced that the killer either works at the Gala Club or is a regular patron."

"That's probably as good as a guess as any other. I can't think of anyone at the apartment house who might have any connection to the murders."

"When she used to visit me here at the shop, I can remember Heather mentioning three men in particular. Art Saxon, the owner of the night club. Marty Mitchell, a standup comic who works there. And a regular customer who was forever trying to get Heather to go out with him. She made it clear that she wanted nothing to do with him."

"Heather and Marty had a thing going, didn't they?" I asked.

"Yes. It was one of those on-again, off-again romances, but the last time I spoke with Heather, it was definitely on. She even hinted at the possibility of marriage. Most of their earlier troubles had to do with Marty being too friendly toward the ladies. But Heather said they'd finally reached an agreement on that."

"So we've got three possible suspects to start out with," I said. "What next?"

"You're going to the Gala Club tonight, Leo," Faye said with finality. "Talk to Art and Marty. See if you can find out anything about the man who used to pester Heather. Use your writer's sensi-

tivities to tune into anything unusual going on there. Make a mental note of everything you hear. Then, come back here, and we'll hash it over. Who knows? Maybe we can come up with something."

I was very skeptical of Faye's plan, but her reference to my writer's sensitivities hooked me. A writer who hasn't produced anything in well over a decade needs all the recognition he can get.

Besides, the role appeal to me. I'd read enough detective fiction in my time to feel comfortable playing Watson to Faye's Holmes. Actually, we were probably much closer to Archie Goodwin and Nero Wolfe. I was tall, slender, and graying at the temples. Even a bit sophisticated under the right conditions, I liked to think. Faye was overweight, perhaps brilliant, and a veritable recluse.

All we needed were a brownstone on West 35th Street and some orchids, I thought as I left the shop.

THE GALA CLUB was sandwiched between an X-rated movie theater and a beauty shop. Above the entrance, flickering turquoise lights spelled out ALA UB, and tattered posters promoted the entertainment inside. I wondered how often the signs were changed. Heather Storm was still billed as "the Country's Sexiest Singer," and Freddy Lavis would probably be heralded as an "Amazing and

Hilarious Impressionist" for months to come.

It was nine o'clock on a cold, wet night, and I felt uncomfortable wearing a snug-fitting, ancient suit which had hung unmolested in my closet for longer than I could remember. I followed a loud, drunken couple into the cramped foyer of the Gala Club. They stopped to buy a pack of cigarettes from the machine, and I slipped past them and pushed open the padded door.

I'd been here one time in the past, but I was still surprised by how long and narrow the place was. A row of postage stamp tables ran the length of the room squeezed between a booth-lined wall and the bar. A small elevated stage stood near the entrance next to the checkroom. The place was half-filled with talking and laughing people. No one paid any attention to the tall, gangly blonde in a sequined dress who sang of a love that would never die.

A plump girl with shoulder-length brown hair sat behind a counter in the checkroom reading a magazine. She looked up at me with steely gray eyes and smiled without feeling.

"Could you please tell me where to find Art Saxon?" I asked.

"Mr. Saxon should be in his office," she replied coldly. "Just knock on the door at the far end of the bar."

I thanked her and squirmed my way through the maze of tables to

a door labeled *Manager*. As soon as I rapped, a voice called out, "It's open."

The office was even smokier than the nightclub itself. I stepped inside and closed the door behind me. Through the gray haze, I saw a middle-aged man seated behind a metal desk. He glanced up from the papers before him and asked, "What can I do for you?"

I hesitated, not knowing quite how to begin. Finally, I said, "My name is Leo Reynolds. I'm investigating the murder of Freddy Lavis."

"Another cop," he grumbled, and I didn't bother to correct him. "Look, I already told a Detective Silver everything I know about Freddy this afternoon. Can't you get the information from him?"

"I'd rather hear it from you," I said, trying to sound official.

Sighing, Saxon ran his fingers through his thick black hair. "Please, God, let this be the end of it," he muttered under his breath, then looked up at me. "All right, here goes. Freddy worked for me for the past five and a half years. He was damn good at what he did, and he was reliable. But, ever since Heather Storm's murder, he'd been behaving strangely. He seemed nervous and preoccupied, and he stayed to himself more than ever. Then, last night, he went on at twelve-thirty for his second show, just like every other night. He per-

formed for about forty-five minutes and then left. That's about all I can tell you."

"What exactly was Freddy's act?" I asked, stalling for time until a better question occurred to me.

"He did imitations. The president, John Wayne, Carol Channing — the ones the customers recognize right away. Then he did the bit where he imitates voices from the audience. For about ten minutes before he went on, he would mingle with the customers, eavesdropping on their conversations. Then, on stage, he'd repeat what he heard. People usually got a big kick out of it."

"Did he repeat anything that might have offended anybody last night?"

"Not that I recall. I only caught part of the act, though. Wait a minute. One thing was kind of strange. Toward the end of the show, Freddy said something like, 'I swear to you that we'll help out in every way that we can. But he shouldn't have to sacrifice the rest of his life for one mistake.' Then he started saying 'Oh, God' and moaning as if he'd been hurt. He spoke it in the voice of Heather Storm. As soon as he did it, Freddy acted as if he were shocked by what had come out of his own mouth. He looked around with a panicky expression on his face, then ran off stage. That was the last I saw of him. A cop stopped by this morning and told me what

happened after Freddy left here. He was as harmless as they come. Why did somebody have to kill him? It just doesn't make any sense. Why would anybody want Freddy dead?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out," I said. "But once we discover who killed Freddy, we'll probably know who killed Heather, too."

Saxon shook his head miserably. "If this keeps up, I won't have any entertainers working here. Did you hear that no-talent out there singing just now? That's the best I could get on such short notice."

"She sure isn't Heather Storm," I said.

"The agency's supposed to send over a couple of impressionists tomorrow, but I'm never going to be able to find another one as good as Freddy. He wasn't very bright, but he could imitate voices better than anyone I've ever heard before. There's a name for people like him — idiot savant, I think. Wise idiot. They can do one thing exceptionally well, even though they're slow in most other ways."

"Heather used to complain about a regular customer who tried to get her to date him," I said. "Do you know anything about that?"

"Not a thing. We've got quite a few regular patrons, but I wasn't aware of any one guy in particular harrassing Heather. But you

might want to talk to Edna Klemp, the checkroom girl, about that. She can see everything that goes on in the club from her booth."

"Did Heather ever go out with any of the patrons?"

"Not that I know of. I'm sure that a lot of men tried to put the make on her, but she always played it straight. She wasn't the type to go off with just any guy. Besides, she and Marty Mitchell were seeing quite a bit of each other lately."

"I'd like to talk with Marty before I leave."

Saxon glanced at his watch. "You can catch him before he goes on at ten-thirty, if he's sober enough to perform. He's been hitting the bottle pretty heavily since Heather was killed. Christ, I'm beginning to think this place must be jinxed. All I'd need is for something to happen to Marty now too. That would mean losing my four best acts in less than three weeks."

"Four?" I said. "You lost someone besides Heather and Freddy?"

"A piano player named Louise Klemp up and quit on me the week before Heather was murdered. She'd only been here for about six months, but she already had a following. She gave me one night's notice, and the next day she left town. The checkroom girl, Edna, is her sister. Even Edna couldn't or wouldn't tell me why her little sister left in such a big

hurry. Then, the next thing I hear is that Louise committed suicide. Swallowed a whole bottle of sleeping pills."

"Edna certainly doesn't seem like the friendly type," I said.

"You're telling me. But don't judge Louise by her sister. Edna's on the fat side and as serious as they come. Louise was a real knockout. She started playing piano in church when she was a kid. I don't think she ever had any formal lessons, but, my God, was that girl talented. In her field, she was every bit as good as Freddy."

"Was she friends with Heather and Freddy?"

"She would have liked to be, but Edna hovered over her like a mother hen. She was afraid that every man who came near her little sister was out to seduce her. She only let Louise play the piano here at all because the job pays well and she could work nearby to watch over her."

"Actually, Edna hates to see people having fun. She was over-protective as hell of her sister, and, when Louise took off and then killed herself, I thought Edna would fall apart. She took a week off and went home for Louise's funeral. She came back to work this past Tuesday, but I wouldn't be surprised if she quit before long. In fact, I almost wish she would leave. A nightclub is no place for a puritan."

"Any ideas on why Louise

might have killed herself?"

"Nope. And Edna is as tight as a clam about the whole thing."

"When exactly did Louise commit suicide?"

Saxon thought for a moment, then said, "April seventeenth. The Monday after Heather was murdered. You don't really think there's a connection, do you?"

"Who knows?" I said. "But it almost seems to neat to be coincidental. Where can I find Marty now?"

"He's probably in his dressing room. You've got to pass through the checkroom to get to it. Just ask Edna. Tell her I gave you the okay."

"Thanks for your time, Mr. Saxon," I said.

"Don't mention it. Just catch the damned murderer, will you?"

"We're trying our best," I said and left the office. I was beginning to feel pretty important. Saxon had mistaken me for a cop, and he hadn't caught on to the truth the whole while we'd been talking. The only people who had really known me at the Gala Club had been Heather and Freddy, and they were in no position to give me away. As long as no one asked to see my badge, I'd be able to get all the information I wanted. I smiled to myself as I thought of telling Faye about my evening. Archie and Nero, move over.

EDNA KLEMP was still reading

her magazine when I got back to her. Once again, she flashed her automatic smile.

I debated a moment whether or not to ask about her sister, then decided against it. "I'd like to speak to Marty Mitchell, please," I said.

The smile faded as quickly as it had appeared. Somehow, I felt that the hard face now glaring at me revealed the true Edna Klempe when not soliciting tips.

"Are you a policeman?" she asked.

I nodded but said nothing.

"Well, I'm sure that Marty would be delighted to talk to you if he's not too drunk," she said icily. "He'd be even happier to talk to you if you had a fifth of bourbon with you."

"I won't take up much of his time," I said uncomfortably. "I just want to check on a few things."

"That drunken slob can't tell you anything more about Freddy. But I'll tell you who you should be looking for. A man used to come in all the time just to sit and watch Heather. He'd get a table as close to the stage as he could. Then he'd sit and stare at Heather as if she were the greatest singer who'd ever lived. Heather herself told me that he was forever asking her to go out with him. He never gave her a moment's peace. He was here the night Heather was killed, and I spotted him again last night. He asked for his coat

and left shortly before we closed at two. After work, I walked down to my bus stop on the corner, and I saw him hurrying out of the alley."

"Did you tell this to the police?" I asked.

Edna's eyes narrowed suspiciously. "They never asked me, but I'm telling you. You *are* a cop, aren't you?"

"I'm an investigator," I said. "Can you describe the man?"

"Sure. He was five ten or eleven. About a hundred seventy-five pounds. Pushing forty. Dark greasy hair slicked back. Dark complexion and brown eyes. He had a real mean look on his face, like he was a gangster or something."

"You've been very helpful, Miss Klomp. Now, may I please see Marty?"

Edna made no reply, but she lifted a section of the counter, and I stepped into the tiny compartment crowded with coats.

"He's in there," Edna said, nodding toward a door at the back of the checkroom.

I rapped lightly on the door. A man's voice called out, "What do you want?"

"Investigator," I said.

The voice muttered a curse, then said, "Come on in."

I opened the door, went in, and shut it quietly.

Marty Mitchell was lying on a couch in a room that wasn't much bigger than the checkroom. With

an effort, he sat up and gestured for me to sit down on a folding chair in the corner.

"Have a seat in the star's dressing room," he said. "Quite a place, isn't it?"

He lifted a bottle of bourbon from the floor and poured some into a paper cup. "Care for a drink?" he asked.

"No thanks. I'd like to ask you a few questions about Heather Storm and Freddy Lavis."

His handsome face contorted with grief, and he gulped the bourbon.

"What do you want to know? There's really not much I can tell you."

"You were a good friend of Heather's, weren't you?"

He nodded and stared at the cracked linoleum floor. "We were engaged to be married. I proposed to her right in this room on the Friday night she was murdered. She accepted. We didn't even have a chance to announce it, but we were planning on an August wedding. Just when everything was starting to go right for us, she had to die."

"Why do you say 'starting to'?"

"Heather and I used to argue quite a bit. She thought I tried to make it with every broad I met, and she was right — I did. I felt that I had to prove that I was a real man. Heather made me realize that I had a lot of growing up to do. Last month, we talked everything out and came to an

understanding."

Marty gazed at me with tear-filled eyes. "And in a few minutes, I've got to go out there and tell jokes. I'm supposed to make people laugh. The only way I can force myself onto that stage is to stay drunk. I don't think I've drawn a sober breath since I found out Heather had been murdered."

"Listen, Marty, a word of advice. Pull yourself together. We both know that Heather wouldn't want you to kill yourself with booze."

"Did you know her?" he asked.

"Yes. We lived in the same apartment building."

"Then you're not a cop," he said. "No cop would live in a dump like that."

"No, Marty, I'm not a cop. Call me an investigator. Did Heather ever tell you about a customer who used to give her a hard time?"

"There were a few. No one in particular comes to mind though."

I described the man Edna had told me about. "Does he ring a bell?"

"Yeah, come to think of it, he does. But I haven't seen him around in months."

"Edna says she saw him the Friday night Heather was killed and again last night."

"Then he probably was here. That frigid bitch doesn't miss a trick." He glanced toward the door defiantly, knowing that his

words had carried into the check-room. "I don't recall seeing myself, but I doubt if I'd notice King Kong in the audience."

"What about Louise Klemp?" I asked. "Do you have any idea why she might have quit her job so abruptly and then killed herself?"

Marty drew in a sharp breath. His features tightened, and he suddenly appeared almost sober. "Louise, beautiful Louise," he whispered, then looked at me. "I thought that I'd finally gotten through to Louise and then she left without even saying goodbye. Edna got to her. Living with that puritanical sister of hers is what killed her. Edna made her feel guilty if she so much as smiled."

"What do you mean you'd finally gotten through to her?"

Marty cleared his throat nervously and shifted his gaze downward. "We had fun together. That's all. Now, I've got to get ready to go on stage."

"Thanks for your help, Marty. And take it easy on the bourbon."

Edna Klemp's face was turned toward the door when I came out.

"Well, do you know anything more than you did before?" she asked in a sharp tone. "I told you that drunk couldn't tell you a thing."

IT WAS AFTER eleven o'clock by the time I started walking the

couple of blocks back to Faye's shop. I could have saved a few minutes by taking the shortcut through the alley, but I would have hiked miles out of my way to avoid it.

A light shone through the window at the novelty shop. When I opened the door, Faye was seated on her chair behind the cash register, reading a newspaper. She looked up at me with a startled expression on her face.

"Sorry," I said. "I should have knocked."

"Never mind that," she said. "Did you see Saxon and Mitchell?"

"Sure did."

"Then tell me exactly what they had to say, right from the beginning. Don't leave anything out, no matter how unimportant it might seem."

I told her the whole story, starting with the drunken couple at the cigarette machine. I may not have written much in my life, but I've still got a writer's eye for detail and a damned fine memory.

All the while I spoke, Faye stared into my face intently. Occasionally, she asked a question or nodded, but mostly she just listened.

When I finally wrapped it up with Edna Klemp's bitter farewell, Faye leaned forward and poured us both a cup of coffee. She frowned in deep concentration.

"The answer is there, Leo," she said firmly. "We've just

got to find it. Maybe the killer is the dark man Edna described. Everything seems to point to him. But, somehow, the evidence against him sounds too pat to believe. And, now, this business about Louise Klemp complicates matters even further. Why would a beautiful young girl leave her job so suddenly and then kill herself? It must be tied in with the other deaths.

"First, Heather is murdered. Two days later, another girl commits suicide. Two weeks after that, Freddy is killed. They all performed at the same nightclub. I'm convinced that Freddy knew something about Heather's death and maybe Louise's suicide, as well. That's why he had to die. But where does Louise fit into this? We've got to think, Leo, think."

We thought.

We sat in silence, each of us trying to fit the pieces together into a logical whole. Every now and then, Faye would mutter to herself or light another cigarette. Several times, she repeated Freddy's, and probably Heather's, final words, as though they contained the essential clue.

We'd been sitting there for nearly an hour when Faye suddenly gasped and stood up. "When does the Gala Club close?" she asked.

"Two o'clock," I answered. "Why?"

"Then we've got half an hour

to get there. We're going to be waiting outside at closing time."

"What did you come up with?"

"I think I know who murdered Heather and Freddy and why Louise Klemp killed herself. But there's only one way to be sure. I've got to confront the murderer face to face."

"Who is it?" I demanded.

When Faye told me, I asked incredulously, "How did you ever arrive at that conclusion?"

"I'll explain later, Leo. Right now, we've got to get over to the Gala Club before the killer leaves. Remember, I don't walk as fast as I used to."

THE TURQUOISE LIGHTS were off above the entrance to the Gala Club, and several stragglers, alone or in couples, emerged into the damp night. Faye and I stood down the street near the alley, watching for one particular person to appear.

Ten minutes later, Marty Mitchell stepped out of the front door and staggered across the street. Edna appeared a moment later. She paused to stare after the drunken comedian, then turned and began walking toward us.

"Hide over there, Leo," Faye commanded, motioning into the darkness of the alley. "She's more likely to show her hand if she thinks I'm alone."

Reluctantly, I crouched behind a couple of garbage cans. Moments later, I heard the slap of

Edna's shoes on the pavement as she hurried toward the bus stop on the corner.

"Miss Klemp," Faye said. "Edna Klemp."

"Yes," Edna answered. "What do you want?"

"My name is Faye. I was a friend of Heather Storm and Freddy."

"So what do you want with me? They were my friends, too."

"Such good friends that you murdered them," Faye said in a strained voice.

"You're crazy," Edna snapped. "Why would I do a thing like that?"

"I know the reason, but I still can't understand the sick, twisted logic that would make a person commit murder because of it. Your sister, Louise, was pregnant, and Marty Mitchell was the father, wasn't he?"

Edna gasped. "Who told you that? Who's spreading that filthy lie?"

Faye ignored the question and said, "Louise quit her job and left the city when she found out that she was going to have a baby. She must have told you that Marty was the father. You thought that he should have married her. In your eyes, it would be better for Louise to marry a man you hated, rather than give birth to an illegitimate child. But those hopes were shattered when you overheard Marty propose to Heather in his dressing room. You realized

that he could never marry your sister if he was going to marry someone else. So you waited in the alley. Heather already knew about Louise and Marty, but she didn't believe that Marty should have to sacrifice the rest of his life for one mistake. That's what she told you right before you stabbed her to death."

Faye paused, waiting for some response from Edna. When none came, she continued. "In your demented mind, you figured that with Heather out of the way Marty would go and marry Louise. What you didn't foresee was Louise committing suicide. My God, you must have made her feel guilty and worthless because of her affair with Marty. Did she kill herself out of guilt or because she found out what you had done to Heather?"

Edna's harsh breathing was the only reply.

"Another thing you didn't count on was Freddy overhearing the murder," Faye said. "It must have come as quite a shock to you to hear Freddy speak Heather's last words on stage last night. Heather's murder had been preying on his feeble mind for two weeks, and he became confused during his act and quoted her. That's when you decided that he had to be killed, too."

Edna's breath came in loud, ragged pants, but, when she spoke, her voice sounded composed. "Lady, you don't know

what you're talking about. Louise was an angel — she would never have given herself to that filthy pig."

"You'd like to believe that, but it's not true. You may as well confess, Edna. You're trapped. You tried to put the blame on a dark patron, but the man who used to bother Heather hasn't been around in months. You're the only one who claimed to have seen him. It'll be interesting to see how the police react to what I have to tell them."

"They won't believe a word of it," Edna said. "They'll know that you're just a crazy old lady."

"We'll see."

Suddenly, I heard Faye grunt; and then somebody fell heavily to the ground. I leaped up from behind the garbage cans and saw the glint of the knife Edna had pulled from her purse. She was poised to pounce on Faye's prostrate bulk.

"Stop," I shouted. "Don't do it, Edna."

The woman's face turned in my direction. Her lips were drawn back in a grotesque snarl, and she glared at me with maniacal rage.

Edna was ready for me when I rushed toward her, and she thrust the knife upward at my stomach. I heard the fabric of my suit-coat rip and felt a searing pain along my side. I grabbed the hand holding the knife and twisted it with all of my strength. The knife clattered onto the ground. Edna

scrambled down on hands and knees, groping for it, but Faye managed to kick it farther into the black alley.

Edna wheeled around in terror and confusion, then began running down the street. She disappeared around a corner.

I hurried over to Faye who was struggling to stand up.

"Are you all right?"

"Except for being a little shook up, I'm fine," she said, brushing cinders from her coat. "How about you?"

"She slashed my side," I said. "I don't think it's very deep, though,"

"Let's get over to the Gala Club and call the cops," Faye said. She was already several steps ahead of me.

BY NOON the next day, it was all over. Faye and I had spent most of the night answering questions at the police station, and I'd put in an hour at the emergency ward getting my side patched up. Before driving us back home, one of the cops told us that Edna Klemp had been picked up at her apartment. With a little prodding, she had confessed to the murders of both Heather and Freddy.

Now, back in our familiar seats at the novelty shop, I said, "Well, congratulations, Faye. You figured it out."

Faye's face looked drawn and haggard, and her expression gave no indication of her pride in her

deductions. She absently stroked the black cat on her lap and said, "It was pretty much all in what you told me, Leo. I'm surprised you didn't see it yourself."

"You're the detective, Faye. I'm just your bumbling Watson. Or should I say Goodwin?"

Faye looked at me quizzically for a moment, then said, "Actually, just about everything pointed toward Edna. Both Saxon and Mitchell said that Edna was a puritanical prude, and Marty admitted that seducing women bolstered his ego. He'd be sure to go after Louise if she was as beautiful as everyone said she was. And Edna would just as surely want to protect the sister she guarded over so closely. When she learned that Louise was pregnant, it must have destroyed her. Instead, in the long run, it destroyed Louise, Heather, and Freddy."

"But how did you know that Louise was pregnant? It must have been more than a lucky guess."

"Freddy told us," she said simply.

"What?"

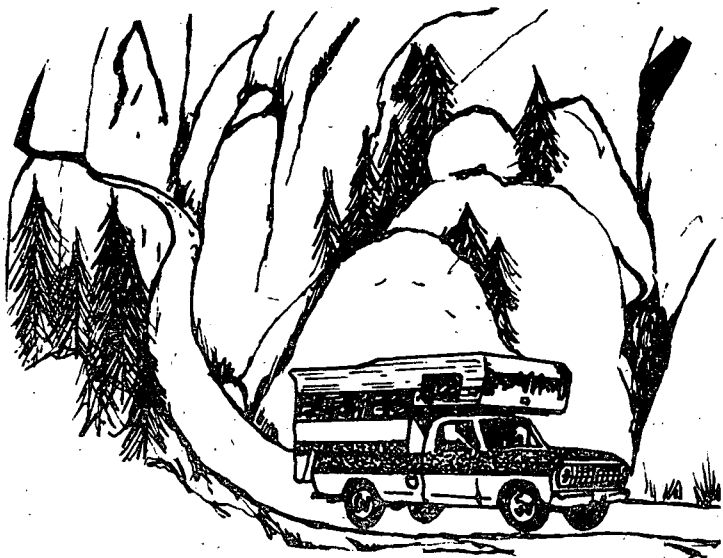
"When you found Freddy, he made a circular hand motion over his belly. What else could he have meant?"

"You're amazing, Faye," I said, as I lit my pipe.

"There's a story for you to write in all of this, Leo."

"You know," I said, "That's an idea."

Carmen



by KATHLEEN HERSHEY

All Men Were Pretty Much Alike to this Fickle Beauty. And
She Was Lonely . . .

CARMEN WAS beautiful. Her slim body had a hypnotic effect on men. They could scarcely take their eyes away from her.

Carmen was asleep in the upper bunk inside the camper when it was stolen. She slept peacefully for a long time.

The unsuspecting thief drove for miles before Carmen awoke refreshed from her nap. Instantly she sensed that something was wrong. Johnny usually whistled or played the radio while he was driving. The only sounds coming

from the cab now were faint engine noises.

Carmen was lonely, and not particularly loyal. She and Johnny had been a lot of places together. They had had some good times and some bad. He proved it by lavishing her with attention. He never ignored her. He had always seemed to enjoy showing her off.

She would miss Johnny, but she was curious and lonely now. She decided to slip down to the open boot of the camper and see who was driving. She would play it

cool. She knew how to handle men.

She moved toward the boot for a better view, wondering where Johnny might be right now.

"Faster, faster!" Johnny was saying to the highway patrolman beside him. "I don't want anything to happen to Carmen."

"Take it easy, mister. I'm making good time. Besides, nothing's going to happen to Carmen as long as the guy keeps driving."

"I wish I could believe that," Johnny said.

The officer answered a call from the helicopter pilot circling over the highway. He told them they were gaining on the stolen vehicle. The thief must be an inept driver, the pilot suggested, or not used to the winding mountain road of the Grapevine Highway.

"Oh, my God," wailed Johnny.

"We can probably overtake them on the straight stretch about ten miles ahead. Carmen will be okay if she just stays quiet."

"Carmen's not the type to lay low. She likes action. She can't stand to be ignored."

Just then, from their vantage point on the edge of the mountain road, Johnny and the officer saw the camper winding through the canyon ahead of them.

Carmen was unaware of the California Highway Patrol car. She was slowly, silently making her first move. So far the driver was

ignoring her. Perhaps he had not seen her head behind him. He kept looking at the side-view mirror.

Enough of this, Carmen decided. She climbed slowly through the camper boot onto the passenger seat, brushing coyly against the driver's shoulder.

"Christ," he said, staring at her magnificent figure and satiny skin.

Carmen was pleased. She moved closer. Johnny always liked her to be a little forward.

This stranger was certainly different from Johnny. He moved away. He acted as if he did not want her to touch him.

Carmen was not fooled. He was attracted to her. He would glance only occasionally at the road, then stare long seconds at his unexpected companion.

Car thief. Kidnapper. Carmen did not mind. As long as no man ignored her she was happy.

The driver was perspiring now. He gulped. The car ran off the road. He pulled it back on to the blacktop.

Carmen moved sensuously forward. She touched his leg.

"Get away! Get away!" the thief whispered.

He was a shy one, she surmised. There was a game she played with Johnny when he was driving. She moved toward the accelerator.

"No, no, stop!"

He certainly was not ignoring her now. Carmen threw the entire weight of her body onto his legs

and the floor pedals.

"No," the man screamed. The car careened from the asphalt. It swerved back on momentarily, then went out of control completely, slowed briefly in the deep sand on the shoulder and smacked into a young oak tree.

Puzzled but unhurt, Carmen crawled back onto the passenger seat.

The driver hung silently over the steering wheel.

The helicopter radioed a report of the accident to the patrolman and Johnny.

"It doesn't look too bad," the pilot said.

In less than five minutes they arrived at the scene. Johnny scrambled out and raced to the passenger side of the camper. The officer, gun drawn, opened the driver's door.

"Carmen, baby, you're all right," Johnny crooned as he pulled her toward him and checked her carefully.

The officer reholstered his gun. He examined the unconscious criminal.

"He's dead. No obvious external wounds. Hear attack's my guess," the officer said, staring hypnotically at Johnny's sleek companion . . . a seven-foot boa constrictor.

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Friend Of The Family

by JACK RITCHIE

The Kid Had Possibilities — but His Mother Knew Best . . .

MABLE ASKED ME OVER because she wanted me to talk her boy Dave out of trying to play professional football.

"When do you graduate?" I asked.

"Next June," Dave said. "My degree is in physical education."

Dave was five foot ten and weighed around 170. He lived football, ate football, and dreamed football.

I turned a page of the scrapbook he'd brought out for my inspection. "In high school you made the state all-star team?"

He tried to be modest about it. "There were a lot of good backs around at the time. I was lucky to get picked."

"If he's got to go into sports," Mable said, "why couldn't it be baseball? It's a lot safer, and he got on the state all-star team for that too."

My eyes went to the framed photo portrait of Dave's father on the fireplace mantel. How long had Joe been dead? About ten

years? Joe had been one of the best hit men the Syndicate had ever had. Twenty-two contracts and not even so much as a traffic ticket.

"Yesterday Mr. Wannecker was here," Dave said. "He's with the Pittsburgh Steelers' front office. And I also got a letter from New Orleans Saints last week."

"Anything besides that?"

"Not yet."

I turned another page of the scrapbook. Dave as a college freshman. No newspaper photographs. Freshman games aren't that important. Just a few small clippings, and half of them from the school paper. "Who made the top offer?" I asked.

"The Steelers."

"How much?"

"The first money isn't so important. There's always a chance for more when you're playing with a contender. Just being on a Super Bowl team could nearly double my salary."

I glanced up at Joe's photo-

graph again. Joe had been a drinker. And one night he took one too many and his car didn't make a curve.

I turned my attention back to the scrapbook. Dave as a sophomore. Not too much print there, either. His big years were his junior and senior.

I pointed to one of the clippings. "You didn't do too bad in baseball, either. You got the conference batting crown."

He brushed that off. "Football's really my game."

Mable brought Coke and ice. Just that. Coke and ice. Ever since Joe's accident, Mable wouldn't allow any liquor in her house. Not even beer.

"I don't like the idea of Dave playing football for a living," she said. "Once he broke his ankle. Another time it was his collarbone. And then there's his knee always kicking out. He should consider something safe and steady. Something you can depend on year after year."

I agreed and was tempted to make him an offer then and there.

I closed the scrapbook. "Do the Steelers know about the trick knee?"

Unconsciously Dave massaged his right knee. "There's nothing to know."

I sighed. "I got to level with you, Dave. I'm a friend of the family and I'm thinking of your own good. You were a big frog in a little pond. The next pond is too

big for you. You'll get lost."

He flushed. "The Steelers don't think so."

I shrugged. "What did they really offer you? The league minimum? If you don't get cut out in training camp? And what about the New Orleans Saints? All they sent you was a form letter, right? Just fill this out and send it right back. Don't call us, we'll call you? Dave, they mail those out by the hundreds just to cover the field. But they never yet picked up a hot prospect that way. And look at your size. You played fullback at your little league college, but in the pros you'd be light even for a quarterback."

His flush deepened. "I'm a hard-nosed player. That makes up for size."

"Sure, sure," I said. "You're a hard-nosed player. But so is everybody up there in the professional leagues. All hard-nosed and all bigger and all faster than you. You got to face the facts, Dave. We can't always do what we like to do or be where we want to be."

Mable nodded quickly. "But you've still got that baseball offer from the Milwaukee Brewers. You wouldn't get hurt like you would in football."

Dave sighed and then smiled faintly. "All right, Mom. I'll sleep on it a few nights and we'll see. But I'm not promising anything."

I WAITED until he left the room with the scrapbook. "To tell you the truth, Mable, I don't think he'll make it in baseball either. At least not in the major leagues."

She seemed to agree. "Probably you're right. But I'll let him have this sports kick and then maybe he'll take up something serious later. Like law school."

"I could offer him a spot in the organization right now," I said. "You can't beat the pay and you only got to work two or three days a year."

"That's the whole trouble," Mable said. "Dave would have all that free time. He'd hit the bottle just like Joe did. I know he would. No, Dave has got to have something that keeps him busy

fifty-two weeks a year."

She saw me to the door.

"By the way, Mable," I said. "I may have something for you in a couple of weeks. Hennessy in St. Louis has been giving the organization some trouble."

She nodded. "Give me a couple of days' notice so I can get a permanent."

When Joe died, Mable stepped into his shoes. We like to keep the business in the family, and besides she had the kid to bring up and send to school. She's handled nineteen contracts so far and we can depend on her.

I turned up my collar as I left. The air was a little nippy, but perfect for football.

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Stiff Competition

by JOHN BALL

At the Second International Crime Writers' Conference in New York last year Dorothy B. Hughes received the award of Grand Master, as well as she should. "If you wake up in the night screaming with terror, don't say we didn't warn you," the New York Times said of her work. Now Bantam is reprinting many of her early, classic books in fresh paperback editions; so far we have seen *In a Lonely Place*, *Ride the Pink Horse*, and *The Fallen Sparrow*. If you don't know your Hughes, here's a good chance to catch up. Incidentally, Mrs. Hughes will be at the University of California third annual Mystery Writers Conference at La Jolla early in August. Write to the extension division of UC San Diego for details.

☆☆☆

Jack the Ripper has a secure

place in crime history. There have been many books about him, the best being *The Complete Jack the Ripper* by (Sergeant) Donald Rumbelow, the Chairman of the British Crime Writers Association. Several people have offered "solutions" to the Ripper's hidden identity. The latest entry is *Prince Jack: the true story of Jack the Ripper* by Frank Spiering. (Doubleday \$8.95) The author builds a very convincing case against the weak, homosexual Edward, Duke of Clarence, the grandson of Queen Victoria and possible heir to the British throne. Unquestionably Mr. Spiering did exhausting research and explored files closed to the public, but he was frustrated when vital papers which might have settled the matter permanently were burned by the son of a just deceased father in order to keep the secret.

Lovers of mystery fiction will certainly enjoy this reconstruction of the Ripper's crimes and the evidence presented that they involved one of the greatest cover-ups of all time.

☆☆☆

A belated review copy brings us the good news that Reverend Randolph is back with us again. This unconventional cleric made a smashing debut in *Reverend Randolph and the Wages of Sin*, a book not to be missed, in 1974. Reverend R. isn't a mild Father Brown or a diminutive Rabbi David Small; he quarterbacked the Los Angeles Rams, lives in a penthouse, and has a girlfriend who is not averse to getting his breakfast. These activities don't diminish his professional abilities in the least. In *Reverend Randolph and the Avenging Angel* he is called upon to marry his former (female) roommate to another man in a high society wedding. That starts things off. Now, thanks to Charles Merrill Smith, himself a minister with big city experience, we have *Reverend Randolph and the Fall From Grace, Inc.* (Putnam \$8.95) Delightful entertainment and a good mystery with the Reverend during his stuff as both cleric and detective. If you can't buy gas, walk to the bookstore to get this one, but don't miss it.

☆☆☆

For a wild and improbable romp that is lots of fun, have a go at

X Marks the Spot by Michael Butterworth, a black comedy in which a small group of conspirators plot to steal the remains of Karl Marx from his grave in London and convert them into Das Kapital. The means of thieving the body is ingenious and the pace is brisk throughout. The final resolution is quite literally fantastic; our hat is off to the author for making this one work. A wonderful evening's entertainment if you don't mind a few bones rattling about (Doubleday \$7.95)

☆☆☆

Nora Berry debuts with her book *Sherbourne's Folly*, which is all about an English country house with a maze behind it. The setting is not bad, but there is too much bickering and people who are "bitter." The crime element is minimal and no valid clues are given. Some ladies may like this, but it's not our cup of tea. (Doubleday Crime Club \$7.95)

☆☆☆

In case you have missed him up to now, a perfectly splendid detective is Sergeant Verity, who is a British police officer in the 1850's. Assigned to India soon after the famous mutiny, he is at his best in *Sergeant Verity and the Imperial Diamond*. This is a fine novel of India accurately reconstructed by author Francis Selwyn and deserving of being called literature. The sergeant is highly resourceful, but official snobbery keeps him from the least

appreciation or recognition. We found this in a Futura paperback and recommend it without reservation. The Scene of the Crime Bookshop has it (13636 Ventura Blvd., Sherman Oaks, California \$1.95)

☆☆☆

Robert Bloch has a mind that deals deftly with horrors of various kinds that would win the respect of Count Dracula. Sample: a vicious pawnbroker kicks in the head of a set of drums that a client has left in hock. He disappears, and the body is not recovered. Shortly thereafter the client is back playing his drums as before, all equipped with a nice new stretched skin for the proper musical effect. The Mysterious Press is a new, small publisher in New York that specializes entirely in the crime fiction genre. When they offered *The King of Terrors* by Bloch it went well, so now there is an encore volume called *Out of the Mouths of Graves*. Beautifully produced in real cloth and an excellent dust jacket, it contains sixteen short stories, well coagulated. Some are very short, but all have Bloch's nightmare imagination on display. The books are \$10.00 each or \$25.00 in a limited, autographed edition. Available from The Mysterious Press, 129 West 56th Street, New York, NY 10019. Pleasant dreams!

☆☆☆

William Hallahan won the Ed-

gar for best novel of the year, with his *Catch Me, Kill Me* last year, so his new offering is of unusual interest. In *Keeper of the Children*, however, he has gone into the field of the supernatural with a Tibetan monk doing strange things with children in Philadelphia. One father fights back against the forces of evil. Only for those who want to grapple with the unknown, and not for those who are well informed on Tibetan monasticism and religious practices. (Morrow \$7.95)

☆☆☆

A most unusual book, and a highly engaging one, is *Murder by Microphone*, which introduces the detective team of Inspector Coggin and Sergeant Sump. John Reeves put in a long career with Canadian broadcasting, now he takes it apart and leaves behind a smoking ruin. This is not a vicious attack, but a penetrating look at idiot programming and the executives that spawn it. The book is filled with sardonic footnotes. Little action, but good deduction and a close look at broadcasting practices viewed with a completely satirical eye. A typical line: "Little remained of the voices that have riveted Canada from coast to coast with play-by-play accounts of quilting bees, reports of the opening ceremonies of municipal reservoirs, and color-commentary on the grafting of hybrid plums." The CBC may never be the same. (Doubleday \$7.95)

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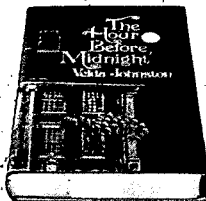
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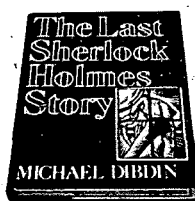
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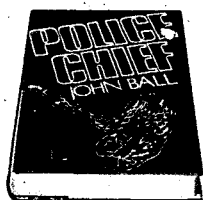
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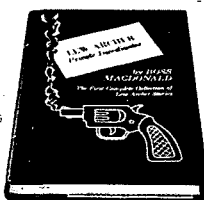
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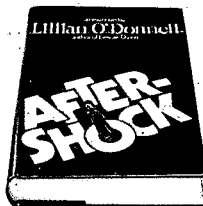
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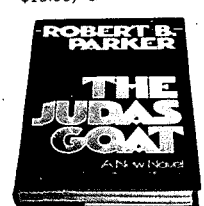
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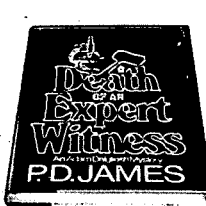
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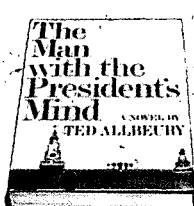
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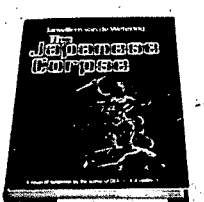
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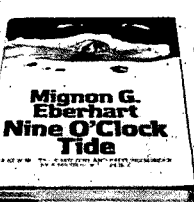
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